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THE BURNT MILLION.

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CHAPTER I.

JOSH.

IN the old Court suburb, Kensington, there are still a few fine old houses standing back from the road, with gardens attached to them of considerable size, and adorned with noble trees, especially the cedar. Its 'layers of shade,' though deadly to the turf beneath them, are welcome indeed to the Londoner during the summer heats. As he sits on his rocking-chair, shut out from all the din and dust of the streets, and with only the muffled roar of the great city breaking on his ear like a distant sea—yet within reach of all that makes life worth living—he combines, as few can do, the advantages of town and country; the knowledge that the eye of the capitalist and the enterprising builder is on him, and that such pleasures will be short-lived, may decrease his enjoyment, but not in all cases.

In that of Mr. Joseph Tremenhere, for example, the tenant of Lebanon Lodge, who is thus enjoying a cigar of the finest brand and of the size of a sausage, this reflection is rather soothing than otherwise. He is a man who is not displeased with the notion of a transitory pleasure so long as it will last his time. As his lease has still to run for twenty years, and he is sixty-five years of age, this he thinks may be reckoned upon; and Mr. Tremenhere's calculations are generally correct.

He may have made one or two mistakes in life (though it would be difficult to convince him of it), but not in figures. He may not be good at music and the fine arts—though they are both in a sense at his service, in common with everything else that money can buy—but at ‘totting up,’ as he playfully terms it, he has no rival. He has totted up his own fortune, from the proverbial half-crown, with which as a friendless boy he came to London, to something like a million of money. It is difficult to appreciate the magnitude of this sum, though a master of numbers has helped us to do so, by pointing out that the bunches of chestnut blossoms on one side of the long drive in Bushy Park—which seem to the unscientific eye innumerable—may be considered to ‘tot up’ to that amount. ‘Sell them for a sovereign apiece,’ as Josh would say, ‘and there you are.’ Mr. Joseph Tremenhere, notwithstanding the great respect in which he is held by the world at large, is familiarly known by it as ‘Josh,’ and even called so by his more audacious clients to his face, and without rebuke. Indeed, supposing their rank is sufficiently high to justify it, he rather likes it; for it shows that he is hand and glove with them. Dukes have taken that pudgy hand of his with heartfelt, if transitory, gratitude, for he has dragged their graces out of many a hole. Its stumpy but scrupulously clean fingers sparkle with costly rings that have been bestowed upon him by noble lords in return for the assistance which Jews and lawyers have alike denied to them; they come to him as a last resort, and often express a genuine regret that they have not earlier applied to such a benefactor of their species; often, we say, but, it must be confessed, not always.

They are welcomed by him, without exception, with courtesy and good will; if they are but frank with him, it is ten to one that they will not repent it; he finds meat on their bones, where others have assured them there is no meat; but in cases where there is so very little of it that it hardly repays Mr. Joseph Tremenhere for his trouble in discovering it, he naturally keeps it for himself. He is not going to set noblemen and gentlemen on their legs merely to walk away without fee; and their skeletons become his detractors. But who cares for what people say who have neither money nor credit? Certainly not Mr. Joseph Tremenhere. His own review of his past is as favourable as any one could expect—much more so than most reviews. Josh’s temper is something angelic; he has stood things which very few people, even philosophers, could have borne without indignation; and his conscience is even more under

control. Its still small voice was always the reverse of importunate, and Josh is growing a little deaf. One may almost say that it *never* troubles him. When he looks back upon his life, he is astonished, like the great shaker of the Pagoda tree, at his own moderation. He has done pretty well for himself, no doubt but in some cases he might (as he reflects with a sigh) have done even better. He thinks over his feats of finance with a pardonable pride, for indeed they have been unparalleled. He has rushed in where lawyers have feared to tread, and snatched from ruin scores of great estates, or at all events portions of them. He has stood in the way between them and hundreds of grasping greedy creditors, and defied them ; whip in hand, he has gone down among the snarling crowd, and slashed their faces for them ; nay, he has done far more dangerous things—trodden on the very confines of the criminal law—the crust of the volcano—and yet saved both himself and his client.

His future, so far as he concerns himself with such a matter, is assured to him. If he has to live on his principal, which would, however, seem to him a very monstrous notion, much as the idea of living by theft would seem to the intelligent and doubtless honest reader, he could still live all the rest of his life in great prosperity, or, as he himself would have expressed it, ‘like a fighting cock.’

It is indeed the vast amount of money he has made, strange as it may seem, which troubles him.

‘What will become of it when I am gone?’ is the question he is always putting to himself. How to preserve it to his children ; how to prevent them from doing away with it themselves, and especially other people from doing away with it for them ? He does not want *them* to be coming cap in hand to some other ‘Josh,’ to entreat him to save something of *his* property out of the fire for them. He has a bad opinion of other ‘Joses,’ if indeed there is one in all Christendom worthy to be called by his great name. In Judea there certainly is not. Mr. Joseph Tremenhere is a Jew himself (though some people call him a Samaritan), but a very ‘wet’ Jew ; not at all solicitous about the weightier matters of the law, much less the smaller ones, and seldom seen at synagogue. He has fought and conquered his brethren of Israel many times, and none of them, as well they know, can stand against him : it is something to be the greatest moneylender that London has ever produced : but Mr. Joseph Tremenhere is far more

than that. He is a money-maker. Out of estates mortgaged to the hilt, out of fortunes sunk in the sand, he has wrung the red gold.

Just at present, however, he is thinking of none of these things, but of his daughter, little Grace, for it is her birthday. She is now coming to him down the lawn, with her straw hat in both her hands, the sun shining on her blue-black hair, and lighting up every line of her Spanish-looking face with beauty. She is slight, and not very tall; but her figure is exquisitely graceful; she has passed the brook of childhood, for she is seventeen, yet still seems to be standing on the hither brink of it; her father calls her 'his little fairy,' which requires no great stretch of imagination, for she in truth resembles one; her eyes are so bright, and her face so full of glee, that under the dark cedar she moves like sunshine.

'You naughty, naughty girl!' murmurs her proud father lovingly; 'why are you without your hat? You will have a sunstroke.'

'But see what I have got *in* my hat, papa!'

He has been so entranced by his darling's beauty, that he has not looked at her hat, which he now perceives to be full of the most lovely flowers, all white ones.

His face clouds over in a moment: perhaps the idea that such flowers are used at funerals occurs to his mind, and connects this fragile little creature—the child of his old age—with the grave.

'Who has sent you these?' he inquires gravely, almost sternly.

'I don't know; they have just come, with nothing but this card with them, "To Fairy on her birthday;" is it not kind of somebody?'

Mr. Joseph Tremenhere takes the card and examines the handwriting carefully, and by no means with a pleased expression of countenance.

'Do you know who it is, papa? Oh, do tell me, that I may thank him when he comes this afternoon.'

'How do you know it's a *him*?' he inquires sharply.

'Well, of course, it may be a lady, but we know so few ladies!'

This was very true: the female visitors at Lebanon Lodge were not numerous; nor were any of them likely to have sent bridal flowers (for that was the view of them Mr. Tremenhere had taken) to Grace; they had a wholesome fear of her father, and

would have been careful not to put such things (as matrimony) into his daughter's head.

'It must be some gentleman friend of yours, papa,' continued the girl; 'you have so many friends.'

'Have I?' he said, with a queer smile.

'Well, of course; have I not seen them? Shall I not see them to-day? men of the highest rank, some of them, and all (under pretence of saying "Many happy returns" to poor little me) coming to do you honour.'

'You think that, do you, little one?' he answered, taking her small hand in his, and speaking with gentle gravity.

'Think it? I know it. Have you not told me yourself how you have helped this, that, and the other in their difficulties? And have I not seen with my own eyes how grateful they are to you? I am no longer a child, papa, though I believe you think so, and I know very well that, though of course we are very rich—'

'What! you are rich, are you?' he interrupted.

'Well, of course; that is, *you* are, which is the same thing. Agnes and Philippa always say we are very rich.'

'They do, do they?' He smoked at his cigar in rapid puffs—a sign, as she well knew, that he was displeased.

'Is it wrong, then? or right for them and wrong for me to say so, papa? I am very sorry. They are much older, of course—'

'Tut, tut! They are not much wiser, at all events,' he put in kindly. 'Yes, you are quite right in supposing that your position is as good as theirs. Like them, you are my daughter, though there the likeness ends. You have not offended me at all, little one. It is highly improper that there should be a tear in your pretty eyes on your birthday; let me kiss it away. You were saying that, though we are so rich, something happens or does not happen, which was it?'

'But perhaps I ought not to have said anything about it, papa?'

'Yes, you ought; I like to hear my Fairy talk just as she feels, just as she thinks.'

'Well, then, I was thinking that other people—Mr. Abraham, for instance, and Mr. Isaacs—who are almost as rich as you are, do not have the same friends, neither so many nor such great ones as you have. Miss Abraham does not know a single lord, she says, except one who is unhappily obliged to live abroad.'

'Very likely,' said Mr. Tremenhere with a smile—this time a

humorous one. ‘Well, and we know a dozen or so of these noble personages, don’t we, Grace? And you wonder how that comes about?’

‘No, I don’t wonder, papa, because I *know*,’ she answered gravely. ‘It is because you have been so generous to them, and helped them out of all their troubles. How nice it must be to be so good and kind, and also so powerful! It is easy enough to wish to do good. I can get that far myself; but I am not a fairy, though you call me so. Now, you are like one of those nice enchanters that one reads of in the Eastern tale, who makes it his business to undo the work of wicked magicians, and protect the weak against the strong.’

‘I am, am I?’ Josh had taken his cigar from between his lips with one hand, and was covering his mouth with the other; there was something there he did not wish his child to see.

‘Well, of course you are; everybody knows it. Mr. Roscoe said, when I was talking to him about you the other day, that you are just as kind to animals, since he has often seen you help a lame dog over a stile. But, now that I have shown you my flowers, I must go and dress, dear papa, before the company come; there is just time to give you a kiss before your cigar goes out for want of puffing;’ and she kissed him and tripped away.

Mr. Tremenhere was very stout; he was a large man from many points of view, and there were no wrinkles in his fair fat face, but it had suddenly become very grey and worn. On his brow, too, there now sat a heavy frown. His little daughter, who was all truth and trust, the only human being he knew of whom he could say as much, believed him to be a disinterested and kindly man. He knew a good deal about getting money under false pretences, but this acquisition of tender regard—a young girl’s reverence—was something new and strange to him. He had imagined that, somehow or other, his little Fairy loved him for his own sake, though she had understood, however vaguely, what he was. But now it seemed that she had been all along in a Fool’s Paradise. How long, he wondered, would she remain in it? It must needs be that, sooner or later, she would be undeceived; but woe to him that should wake her from her innocent dreams! Roscoe, of all the men in the world, had contrived to amuse himself with her simplicity, had he? Roscoe, his right-hand man, who knew more of his secrets than anybody, and could tell more things of him. If he had dared to presume upon that

fact—— But here Mr. Joseph Tremenhere's indignation became too much for him, and he rapped out an oath that would be quite unintelligible to the gentle reader. What it meant was, that if the circumstance in question did happen, Mr. Edward Roscoe should learn to his cost, and with a vengeance, the difference between master and man.

CHAPTER II.

LORD CHERIBERT.

An hour later, the grounds of Lebanon Lodge were filling with gay company. Ladies, mostly matrons, of dark complexion and ample proportions, perhaps a trifle over-dressed. Daughters of Judah, who, if they made no ‘tinkling with their feet,’ exhibited elsewhere a considerable amount of personal jewellery. Young ones also, though much fewer, were to be seen about the garden fountain and its fishpond—full of swimming bullion—like so many Rebekahs at the well, waiting, in most cases in vain, for their Isaacs. For of Isaacs, unless old ones, there were very few. The males of the company, who far outnumbered the ladies, were professing Christians, and in most cases had no other profession. Aristocrats of noble race, but who had somewhat slipped out of their order. The Marquis of Baccarat, who was hardly seen at any social gathering, save those rare ones at Lebanon Lodge ; Lord Petronel, Lord Shotover, Lord Camballo, all three of whom would have recently appeared in a court much less highly thought of than that of St. James’ but for the kind interest which Mr. Tremenhere had taken in their affairs. General St. Gatien, once, but not very recently, of the Guards. The band of his old regiment, playing on the lawn, was by no means incited to strike up ‘See the Conquering Hero comes,’ on recognising him ; he was associated in their minds with a piece of music of quite another kind—a march. Sir Tattenham Corner, and many other celebrities of the turf and of the Band of Green Cloth. Some of these eminent guests—for they had all achieved distinction for themselves, and, if not exactly public benefactors, had like ill winds blown some people good, and laid the social journalists in particular under especial obligations—were still young in years ; but their appearance had lost some of the freshness of youth. They had the delicate and ascetic air of young

monks of the cloister, or of too diligent students, though it had not been produced by the same means ; they too, indeed, had burned the midnight oil, but not ‘with blinded eyesight poring over miserable books ;’ they had given their attention only to the books they had made themselves, which, though not published at their own expense, had cost them dearly. Their heavy eyes were sunk in their wan cheeks, and had semicircles of black under them which were not, however, to judge by the looks that were cast at them by the other sex, altogether unattractive. They were undoubtedly distinguished-looking young fellows ; but to persons who were acquainted with what is confidently believed by some people to be ‘life,’ they suggested the deleterious habit of taking green curaçoa and pickled walnuts for their breakfasts. There was, however, one marked exception to them in the person of Viscount Cheribert. This nobleman was but just of age, and looked much younger (his father, Lord Morella, was not only alive, but had barely reached middle life, which, to a young man who lives on post-obits, is a very serious and expensive matter) ; there was no more hair on his fresh young face than on that of an Eton boy in the Lower School ; his complexion was brilliant, but far from hectic—it was perfectly healthy. If teeth are injured by smoking, it must be—to judge by those of Lord Cheribert—because a little smoking, like learning, is a dangerous thing ; a cigar was never out of his mouth—it was whispered that he even smoked in bed—and yet his teeth were pearls. His figure, though slight, was perfect ; he was an adept in all manly games and exercises, but had devoted himself (and many a paternal acre) to piquet. He was an admirable player, but, as is generally the case with games, he had met with men who played better ; it was said that before he was nineteen he had lost eleven thousand pounds at it—without counting what the cards cost, which was a pretty penny—at a single sitting. One can’t help admiring a young fellow who can point to such an item—though unfortunately a deficit—in his accounts as that. Josh had a genuine regard for him, independent of the gigantic losses which in his eyes surrounded this juvenile spendthrift with an auriferous halo. The great money-spinner had a tenderness for the great money-spender ; the Napoleon of Finance a sort of pity for this gay young Blucher, who, though always defeated, never seemed to know that he had been beaten. More than once Josh had faced his father for him—and Lord Morella was not a pleasant man to

face under such circumstances—and pleaded, though not of course on sentimental grounds, for his prodigal son.

Youth and good looks, especially when accompanied by good manners, weigh with every one who is not absolutely destitute of tenderness, which was by no means the case, as we know, with Mr. Joseph Tremenhere; the interests moreover of the two men were (or seemed to be) identical; but what, perhaps, attached Josh to the young fellow more than all was that he perceived in him, notwithstanding his mad ways, a genuine stanchness; that though his money and he were so easily parted, Lord Cheribert was not a fool. Josh thought it just within the range of possibility—that no one else thought it—that the young man might one day become a decent member of society. Respectability was in his blood. It was true he was going to the devil (Josh's devil—Poverty) faster than any young fellow of his means had ever ridden; but there was a chance, just a chance, that he might suddenly pull up; and if he did pull up, it was Josh's opinion that it would be for good and all. He might even become another Lord Morella. To the outside world this forecast would have seemed rank folly; but Joseph Tremenhere, though utterly ignorant of book-learning, had studied the pages of human life to some purpose: ‘In every spendthrift,’ he was wont to say (though only to himself), ‘there lives a miser.’ If for one single instant Lord Cheribert could be brought to see his position (as every one else saw it)—the gulf of ruin on which he stood, and, above all, himself the laughing-stock of every knave who had helped to bring him there—Josh believed he might be saved; and if saved (of this Josh felt sure), every farthing which remained out of the wreck of his fortunes would be saved with him. Whatever was left to him he would stick to like a limpet to his rock; and whatever might accrue to him from thenceforth would be as safe as though it were in his (Mr. Tremenhere's) own strong box.

Each guest, as he arrived, came up to his host under the cedar tree, and said a word or two. ‘His little Fairy’ stood by his side, and sometimes he introduced them to her, and sometimes he did not. He was not the sort of person to whom any man (who knew him) was likely to say, ‘You have omitted to introduce me to your daughter, Mr. Tremenhere.’ It was quite possible that he might presently have told him, and with much plainness of speech, why he had omitted that act of politeness.

To some he held out but a couple of fingers—difficult, but by

none found impossible—to hook ; to others three, to others four. When Lord Cheribert came up smiling—some called him ‘Lucifer, son of the morning,’ in allusion to his naughty ways and the freshness of his appearance—the host offered his whole hand.

‘How are you, Josh?’ was the familiar salutation upon the young man’s lips ; but at the sight of Gracie it became, ‘How are you, Tremenhere?’—an alteration which other sprigs of nobility had not thought it worth their while to make.

‘As well as an old man has any right to be, my lord,’ he said ; and then with a wave of his hand, ‘My daughter, Grace.’

‘This is a very auspicious occasion, I understand,’ said the young fellow ; ‘I wish you many happy returns of the day, Miss Tremenhere.’

His tone was so natural and buoyant that it almost seemed as though a child was speaking to a child.

‘Cheribert has the best manners and the worst morals of any man of his age in Christendom,’ General St. Gatien was wont to say, in strange forgetfulness, as regards one part of the verdict at least, of his own far-off youth.

Grace was put at her ease at once, and thanked him prettily.

‘What a day for a birthday you have got !’ he went on ; ‘but then, I feel sure, you deserve it. Now my last birthday was all wind and rain ; you recollect my coming of age, Tremenhere, for you were so good as to dine with me on that occasion.’

‘I remember it was a very wet evening,’ said Josh with humorous gravity.

Lord Cheribert laughed as lightly as the fountain played. ‘What a charming scene this is ! There are very few gardens like this in London, where the band does not seem too big for it. You like the country better than the town, of course, Miss Tremenhere ?’

‘Indeed I do.’

‘I wish I were your age,’ murmured his lordship with a genuine sigh. He was only four years older than the young lady, but, on the other hand, he had spent, or at all events he owed it, £100,000*l.* in the interval.

‘Oh, but papa likes it better too,’ said Grace gravely, ‘if one could get him to own it.’

‘Really ? Are you so purely pastoral, Tremenhere ?’

‘I like my own place in Cumberland, and the fishing,’ said the money-lender stiffly. He did not like to be chaffed about his

pursuits just now, even ever so little, though, as a general rule, he welcomed chaff; he made grain out of it.

'And whereabouts is your Cumberland home, Miss Tremenhere?'

'Well, it is rather difficult to describe, for it is quite up among the mountains, and away from everywhere, on Halswater.'

'I suppose your father wishes to keep it a dead secret,' said Lord Cheribert, laughing, 'as the way over the fells to Muncaster Castle used to be kept. He has never asked *me*, at all events, to come and see him there.'

'I am afraid life at Halswater Hall would not be much in your line, my lord,' said the money-lender with a gathering frown.

'Don't be hard on me before Miss Grace,' said Lord Cheribert gently. 'Why need you tell her that I have no taste for the picturesque, no love for the beauties of nature, no time now for wholesome pleasures such as fishing——'

'Oh, but I am sure papa didn't mean that,' interposed Grace quickly; she felt really sorry for this innocent and bright young fellow, who imagined himself the subject of such severe reproof; 'I am sure you could not help liking Halswater.'

'Still your father doesn't ask me there,' observed his lordship with humorous persistence. 'My dear Tremenhere, I dote on fishing.'

'I was not aware of it, my lord, though I see you are fishing now,' was the host's grim reply; 'but it's too bright a day for catching anything, even an invitation. Grace, dear, Agnes is calling you.'

'So I am not to be asked, Josh, to this country house of yours?' said Lord Cheribert. His tone, now they were alone, had no longer its pretence of pleading; he had exchanged it for a good-natured familiarity, in which there lurked, nevertheless, a certain seriousness.

'No, my lord, you must not come to Halswater.'

'Indeed! The lake is not private property, I conclude,' returned the young man with a slight flush; 'the river, I suppose, is open to anglers?'

'You have asked me a question, and you have had my answer, Lord Cheribert,' was the cold reply.

'Perhaps you will kindly furnish me with a map of England, Mr. Tremenhere, with the places marked in red ink which I am not to visit?'

'It is not at all impossible that at no distant date you will find the whole island marked out in that way for you, my lord,' was the quiet rejoinder, 'and by less friendly hands than mine.'

The young man lifted his hat—not only in sign of departure; it was a trick he had on the rare occasions when the sense of his true position came over him, the instinct to remove a weight from his brow—and turned away without a word.

'Agnes, come here!' continued the money-lender.

His eldest daughter, who was still talking with Grace, at once left her to obey his summons. She was a tall, fair woman of thirty years of age, but looked older; her features were good, and even classical, but her lips were thin and straight; her hair resembled hay, and there was not a luxuriant crop of it; her eyes were a cold blue, usually lustreless; her eyebrows so faint that through them could be discerned the 'thin red line' by which the historian on a well-known occasion described the British infantry.

'What is it, papa?'

'Keep by your sister's side this afternoon, Agnes; I don't wish strangers to talk with her.'

'You mean by Grace's side, I suppose?'

'Well, I suppose so,' he answered with curt contempt. 'I should think Philippa was old enough to take care of herself.'

It was not a pretty speech, for there was only a year or two between his eldest and his second daughter; but it was not Mr. Tremenhere's habit to make pretty speeches, except to his little Fairy.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEMORANDUM.

AMONG the many things that puzzled people who had the privilege of knowing the Tremenhere family—and some people who hadn't, for Josh and his affairs were much talked about—was why the two marriageable Miss Tremenheres did not take advantage of their position. Miss Agnes has been introduced to the reader, and if her personal attractions were not great, that, of course, was but of little consequence in such a matter. It is only a few men in these days who marry for a pretty face, and their intelligence is not thought very highly of.

Her sister Philippa had narrowly missed being pretty. She was not so tall as Agnes, and, indeed, rather dumpy as to figure; but her bones were better covered. I am speaking of her as she was spoken of among themselves—by her father's male acquaintance, who were much more free of speech in discussing the family than when speaking of ladies of their own class. Her black eyes were 'beady,' and had not much expression. She was almost good-looking enough, they said, 'for a cigar shop.' Of this last matter they were doubtless good judges, but they were not students of character, and there were points in that of Miss Philippa which had escaped all but one of them. To say that three gentlemen out of four, who enjoyed—or at all events possessed—Mr. Tremenhere's acquaintance, would have 'jumped' at the idea of marrying one of his daughters would be to give a very feeble (as well as vulgar) expression to their sentiments; but they knew that the grapes hung too high for them. Moreover, Josh stood in the way of these objects of their ambition like a *chevaux de frise*. It is comparatively easy to run off with an heiress; even if she is a ward of Chancery, you at least get the interest of her money—when you come out of prison; but it was well understood that whoever married one of Josh's daughters without his permission might just as well have married for love. This was hard upon the young ladies, but, unlike most of their sex, they could afford to wait. Their attractions were not dependent upon mere youth and beauty, but on solid worth. At fifty, as everybody knew, they might pick and choose for themselves—so soon as Josh's will was proved—as though they were fifteen. In the meantime, however, they remained single. Every one has his pet antipathy, and Mr. Joseph Tremenhere concentrated his scorn and hate upon the Fortune-Hunter. He loved his Fairy with a paternal passion of which few believed him capable, but he loved his money more, and no one had any doubt of *that* fact. There was no necessity for him to shut up his stately Agnes, or his dark-eyed Philippa, in any castle of steel guarded by dragons; for his iron will—and the thought of his Will—encompassed them and kept them safe. Neither they nor their would-be suitors were under any mistake about the matter. That observation of Mr. Tremenhere's about Philippa being old enough to take care of herself was merely a stroke of humour. He meant rather that she was wise enough to take care of herself, which his little Fairy might possibly not be. The love he had

lavished on her might so far mislead her as to imagine that whatever she did would be forgiven her—even a marriage with a landless lord—a catastrophe indeed to be guarded against. On the other hand, Josh knew that his will would be a law to Grace in quite another sense than it was to her sisters; moreover, she was still so childlike that the thought of ‘such things’ had not as yet so much as entered her mind; only it was well to be on the safe side from the first.

Notwithstanding that the position of affairs as regarded the two elder Miss Tremenheres was so well understood, there were plenty of butterflies to hover about them—or rather of bees, not so much in search of immediate honey as of the garnered store that would some day accrue to them; but there was nothing of seriousness in their attentions. The only person who addressed them with any approach to familiarity was Mr. Edward Roscoe, whose intimate business relations with their father gave him that enviable privilege. When Agnes had been removed from Grace’s side, this gentleman had taken her place—not demonstratively, but in a quiet, natural manner—as her body-guard. He seemed to know by intuition what would be his patron’s wishes. His appearance was rather remarkable. He was of moderate height, but so very upright that one would have taken him for a tall man. He had a clean-shaven face, except for two magnificent whiskers, which were, nevertheless, kept within due limits; it was a handsome face, and when he smiled an attractive one, but its ordinary expression was grave and even saturnine. His complexion was swarthy, though not disagreeably so. His voice, especially when addressing a woman, was very sweet and low; but on occasion—and the occasions were frequent—it could be firm and resolute. He had an air of independence that was almost obtrusive—not at all like that of an underling, yet he was well known to be Mr. Tremenhere’s jackal. It was whispered that, notwithstanding the clean and workmanlike way in which the lion disposed of his bones, Mr. Roscoe was wont to find something on them for himself. His chief power lay, however, in the fact, with which every one was acquainted, that he was a friend of the family.

‘Permit me, Miss Grace, to wish you many happy returns of the day, which I have not yet done by word of mouth;’ and he looked significantly at the beautiful flowers which the girl now held in her hand.

'Then it *was* you who sent me these?' she said with a grateful blush. 'It was *very* kind of you, Mr. Roscoe.'

'It was a great pleasure to me, but not worth speaking about, and you will oblige me by not doing so. Some persons might think it an impertinence in one in my position.'

'An impertinence?'

'Well, I know *you* would not think so; but it is not every one who estimates people for themselves. I should not, for example, venture to give your sisters birthday presents, however humble ones.'

'How strange! I am sure they have both a great regard for you, Mr. Roscoe,' she answered simply.

He smiled, with the least touch of bitterness. 'When you grow older, Miss Grace, you will know the world better, and then I shall keep my distance. At present, you see, I take advantage of your simplicity.'

To judge by his sarcastic look as the girl cast down her eyes, one would have almost said he was really doing it. It changed, as her sister came up, to a smile of welcome.

'Well, Miss Agnes, you are to be on duty, I suppose? My post is relieved.'

'I had no orders for your dismissal, Mr. Roscoe,' she answered gently.

'Then let us keep guard together by all means.'

It was not a superfluous precaution. The Marquis of Baccarat was at that moment lounging up to them with his cigar. Lebanon Lodge was Holiday Hall as regarded smoking. He was slight and of small stature, to which he added an inch by high-heeled boots. He had a little strut in his walk, which gave him a resemblance to a pigeon—and indeed a pigeon he was, though almost plucked. To save him the trouble of keeping his glass on his eye, it was screwed into his hat—a device not so inconvenient as it appeared, since he really could see equally well whether his hat was on or off.

'How are you, Miss Tremenhere?' he lisped. 'Let me congratulate you upon the great success of your garden-party. Everybody is raving about it.'

Though he addressed himself to Agnes, his impudent eyes were fixed upon her younger sister, who, however, took no notice of him. She was still rapt, or seemed to be so, in admiration of her flowers, and talked in an undertone with their donor.

'It is not *my* garden-party, my lord,' said Agnes. She had meant to add, 'it is my sister's,' but a glance from Mr. Roscoe made her pause.

'Well, I suppose not, in one sense,' squeaked the Marquis; his voice, when irritated, was like that of a sucking-pig. 'But as to the founder of the feast, your father, so humble an individual as myself cannot get at him even to say a word of congratulation. His cedar tree yonder is quite a hall of audience.'

'Sir Tattenham has left Mr. Tremehere now, my lord,' observed Mr. Roscoe dryly, 'if you have anything to say to him ;' and as he spoke he interposed himself by a natural movement between Grace and the new-comer. The little lord sheered off, hurling a broadside of invective—so far as looks could do it—upon this faithful sentinel, who remained utterly unmoved.

'A worthless creature, but not dangerous,' he murmured in the elder sister's ear. Agnes nodded adhesion; his lordship's indifference to her charms had been marked enough to arouse any woman's indignation.

'Why does papa invite such people ?' she returned in the same low tones.

'My dear Miss Agnes, he is a Marquis !' said Mr. Roscoe. His most winning smile sat on the speaker's lips as he uttered these words of pretended reproof, and her face reflected the smile. To a keen observer it would have almost seemed to say, 'Your views are mine ; for my part, as you should know, I prefer a man to a marquis.'

Mr. Roscoe's tone to Grace had been more tender, but less confidential, than his manner to her sister; they seemed to have a mutual understanding.

'Philippa, on the other hand, loves a lord,' said Agnes, more in pursuance of her own train of reflection than suggested by the fact that her sister was approaching them in company with Lord Cheribert.

'I am afraid so,' laughed Mr. Roscoe,

'E'en Irish Peers, could she but tag 'em,
With Lord and Duke 'twere sweet to call ;
And, at a pinch, Lord Bally-raggen
Was better than no Lord at all.'

Lord Morella was in the Irish Peerage.

Lord Cheribert, with his bright fresh smile, shook hands with Agnes, and also with Mr. Roscoe. The latter gentleman, unsoftened

by that affability, obstructed, as before, the young man's view of the more attractive object in the background ; he did not understand that he was 'on the free list,' and had already been introduced to Grace by Mr. Tremenhere.

'Papa has been telling Grace, Lord Cheribert informs me,' said Philippa, 'that we are going to Halswater early in the autumn.'

Mr. Roscoe withdrew from his obnoxious position with the swiftness of a magic-lantern slide, and Agnes clapped her hands ; 'I am so glad !' she cried.

'So you too, like your father, are a lover of the country, are you ?' said his lordship, so precipitately that it cut off the expression of astonishment that had risen to Grace's lips. She had no recollection of her father having made any such statement, but it did not now seem worth while to dispute it. Agnes was already eloquent upon the pleasures of life at the Lakes. Lord Cheribert listened to her with apparent interest.

'You are as Arcadian as Miss Philippa, it seems,' he said. 'I am, alas ! only a Burlington Arcadian, but I hope some day to mend my ways. Why does Mr. Roscoe smile like that, I wonder ?' His tone was good-humoured, but, to the ear which it addressed, had a certain severity. There were more reckless men than Lord Cheribert in the 'gilded pale' of Lebanon Lodge that afternoon, but no one with whom it was more imprudent to take a liberty.

'I was not aware that I was smiling, my lord,' said Mr. Roscoe ; and he spoke the truth.

'That is the worst of having too sweet a disposition,' returned his lordship dryly. 'So both you young ladies fish, do you ? Does Miss Grace also fish ?' And he turned his pleasant face to her for the first time.

'No, Lord Cheribert, I do not fish. I think it's cruel.'

'Really ! I thought they had a cartilage, a something expressly given them, so that the hook should not hurt them.'

'But there is the live bait.'

'To be sure, I had forgotten that ; they don't sell it in the Arcade, you see.'

'I don't think you are quite so ignorant as you pretend to be,' laughed Grace.

'Well, that's kinder than Miss Philippa, at all events, who made the same remark just now about my innocence. But I am really like a child in this matter—and a good child too, for I know nothing of the rod. I was in hopes that some of you young ladies

would teach me how to catch trout. I only know one way—when the stream is very dry, to cut what water there is off and leave them stranded.'

'Not a very sportsmanlike proceeding, I must say,' observed Agnes, smiling.

'Never laugh at the ignorant or the poor, and I'm both,' said Lord Cheribert reprovingly. 'What I want is teaching.'

'Well, if you come to Halswater,' said Agnes, 'Philippa and I will teach you to throw a fly.'

'Thanks; that's a bargain. And what will *you* teach me, Miss Grace?'

'I? Nothing; I have everything—so everybody tells me—to learn.'

'Then everybody doesn't tell the truth. Come, you must do *something* when you are in the country, or else, like me, you would feel tempted there to commit *felo-de-se*.'

'No, I do nothing; I only wander over the hills and far away.'

'Then you must know your way about.'

'Not a dalesman of the dales, not a cragsman of the fells, I flatter myself, knows it better,' said Grace with conscious pride.

'Thanks; that's another bargain. I'll put it down in my little book at once.' And here he produced his betting-book, a duodecimo volume he had bought for little, but which had cost him much.

'Mem.: September, to learn how to fish from Miss Agnes and Miss Philippa Tremenhere; to learn "my way about" from Miss Grace.'

'But I never promised to teach you,' she remonstrated.

'But you did not say you wouldn't, and you looked as if you would,' he replied gaily. 'Your excellent father is coming this way, doubtless to ask me to Halswater; but *his* invitation is now superfluous. I shall be there.' He smiled, nodded instead of taking his hat off, but very pleasantly, and was gone. It was very cool of him, of course, but his manner robbed his nod of any impertinence. It was said of Lord Cheribert by his detractors, who after all were few, that he owed much of his personal popularity to the exercise of a certain 'agreeable insolence'; it was not, however, really insolence, but only the perfectly natural manner of a very kindly young fellow who was always accustomed to have his own way.

CHAPTER IV.

A SUSPICION.

LORD CHERIBERT was in error in supposing, or at least asserting, that Mr. Tremenhere had come up to the little party, like a dove with the olive branch, with an invitation for him to Halswater in his mouth. If that gentleman looked like a dove at all, it was one whose feathers have been very much ruffled; his appearance was more like that of an angry hen, who sees her pet chicken endangered by the attentions of a hawk in chick's feathers. Of the hawk proper, with beak and claw highly developed, it was evident he stood in no fear, or he would not have brought General St. Gatien with him, unless, indeed, his haste was such that it did not admit of his getting rid of that gallant officer, with whom he had been conversing under the cedar tree. The General was a tall hairy man, with a sinister expression, and, but for his great height, which seemed to unfit him for naval evolutions, less resembled a soldier than a buccaneer. As he took off his hat with a sweep to the ladies, he looked as if he would have liked to buy all three of them—the youngest for choice—and had forgotten for the moment that he had not the money.

'The three Graces,' he said, 'upon my life, in the Garden of Eden.'

The mythology, perhaps, was a little mixed, but that the General thought he had paid a pretty and acceptable compliment was certain, by the way in which he smiled and drew out his waxed moustaches—a sure sign of self-satisfaction with him.

'Our Eden is not without a serpent, however,' replied Miss Philippa, who had a ready tongue, and was not the least afraid of this warrior, 'for I have seen him.'

'Indeed!' he said, with a flush upon his swarthy face.

'Don't be afraid, General,' she added, with a light laugh; 'I meant nothing personal. It was only a musical instrument; they have a serpent in your band.'

'You're too clever for me, Miss Philippa,' he answered, frowning; there were reasons, though she did not know them, why allusions to his old regiment were displeasing to him.

'What was Cheribert so eloquent to you about just now? You didn't make fun of *him*, I'll warrant.'

Philippa was about to make some jesting reply, when she

noticed that her father, who was speaking to Mr. Roscoe, had suddenly paused as if to listen to her.

'He was enlightening us upon sporting matters.'

'No doubt he fancies himself immensely in his own colours, but, mark my words, he'll break his neck some day.'

Grace looked up quickly, with an ejaculation of dismay.

'Yes,' pursued the General ruthlessly, 'I would recommend no young lady to set her affections upon Cheribert till he has learnt to ride or given up steeplechasing.'

'He *has* given it up,' observed Mr. Tremenhere.

'Not a bit of it, my good fellow; he only said he was thinking of giving it up. You're a better judge of what his thoughts are worth than I am, and doubtless have persuaders for him as sharp as his spurs; but I'll back his obstinacy, though I wouldn't back his horse. He's booked for the Everdale, at all events, and it's a stiffish course.'

'Indeed,' replied Mr. Tremenhere indifferently. But the news was in reality displeasing to him. There were certain arrangements of great importance to him, which, 'if anything should happen' to Lord Cheribert, would turn out very disastrously; and though his business operations were often of a most speculative kind, he resented their being made unnecessarily so. He had two mottoes: one was 'Push' (which he pronounced like 'rush') and the other 'No Risks, as the goose said when she stooped under the barn door.' It might be said of him that he was much less like a goose than a fox, but he was quite as anxious as that prudent bird not to knock his head, and also that other people in whom he had a pecuniary interest should not knock *their* heads—against a stone wall in a steeplechase, for example. He even mechanically cast an uneasy glance at Mr. Roscoe, as though he would say, 'Do you hear that?' to which, however, that gentleman, who was in earnest conversation with 'his little Fairy,' gave no response.

They were bending over those white flowers together, the arrival of which had already given Mr. Tremenhere some discomposure.

'General, an idea has just struck me,' he exclaimed suddenly; 'I think I see my way out of that business about which we were talking together just now.'

'And do you see *my* way?' returned the General pertinently

'I think so,' and he thrust his stout arm through that of his astonished guest and led him away.

The two elder sisters looked at one another significantly.

'Papa is very angry,' said Philippa in a low tone.

'There is no need to tell me that, since I know papa as well as you do,' was the dry reply.

'I suppose it's about Lord Cheribert; I could not help bringing him with me; he asked me to bring him; it is so difficult somehow to refuse him anything.'

Agnes did not answer; her attention seemed to be distracted by what was going on between Mr. Roscoe and Grace. Philippa observed this, and a strange expression flitted across her face; it had displeasure in it, and also a certain cruelty.

'After all,' she said, 'it is not surprising that Grace should have taken his fancy.'

'Whose fancy?' inquired Agnes, sharply, the little colour she possessed suddenly deserting her cheeks.

'Well, of course, Lord Cheribert's; you did not suppose I meant General St. Gatien's surely?' There was a touch of mockery in her tone which did not escape the other's ear.

'Instead of chattering here with me, Philippa,' she said severely, 'it seems to me you ought to be attending to our guests.'

'Why don't you do the honours to them yourself, my dear?' returned the other; 'you are the eldest.'

Agnes' brow grew very black, and a gleam of anger flashed from her eyes; the tone was quiet enough, however, in which she replied, 'Papa has placed me here to take charge of Grace.'

Philippa laughed softly, but not sweetly, and cast a half glance at the couple behind them. What her laugh seemed to say was, 'I cannot congratulate you upon the way in which you are performing your duties.' 'Mr. Roscoe,' she said, 'I have been moved on by the police. Will you give me your escort to the refreshment tent?'

The gentleman appealed to looked up with a quick start, and glanced at Agnes. 'I am unable to oblige you, Miss Philippa, he answered coldly; 'I am under orders to remain on guard here with your sister.'

It was Philippa's turn to look black now: the blood rushed to her face, she pressed her lips closely together as if to restrain herself from speaking, and moved slowly away.

'Why did she want you to go with her?' inquired Agnes under her breath.

'A little shy, I suppose; there are so many people about.'

'Shy? You should rather say sly,' said Agnes contemptuously.

'If so,' replied Mr. Roscoe gravely, 'there is only the more reason for that caution, the necessity of which I have so often ventured to impress upon you.—Your father is coming back to us, Miss Grace; you have an attraction for him to-day, it seems, even greater than usual.'

Mr. Tremenhere had now a lady on his arm; she was dark and plump, had hardly reached middle age, and, but for a certain coarseness of feature, would have been decidedly good-looking. Her name was Linden, and she was a widow. Her dress was magnificent—indeed, a great deal too much so for a garden-party—and sparkled with jewels; but the good nature in her eyes outshone them. Mr. Tremenhere had not many favourites among the female sex, but Mrs. Linden was one of them. It was whispered that she entertained the ambition of becoming something nearer to him than his confidential friend and domestic adviser—a circumstance that prevented her from gaining the good graces of either Agnes or Philippa.

'They are so devoted to their father,' the widow used to say to her intimates with a strange mixture of frankness and sarcasm, 'that it makes them jealous of me.' What she said to herself was, 'They think I want his money—or what they consider *their* money—as if I had not more than I know what to do with already!' And doubtless, though they objected to her influence with their father, their opposition would have been far less keen, could she have placed their minds at ease on this point. Young people can never understand why old people should want to marry, and are always quick to impute bad motives for it; but the true reason for Mrs. Linden's admiration for Mr. Tremenhere was never even guessed at by his daughters. Money, as they suspected, was at the bottom of it, but not greed. The late Mr. Linden had distinguished himself in the same profession; had been, as it were, the attorney-general among money-lenders, but Mr. Tremenhere was the Lord Chief Justice; she bowed down less to the golden calf, than to the intelligence of the man who had built it up, though she perceived no folly in his worshipping it. The hunger for gold is at least as strong with some people as that for land, of which we have lately heard so much; and the pleasure of satisfying it, even

to those who have heaps of it, is fully equal to that of earth-eating. The atmosphere Mrs. Linden had always breathed was aureate ; the ground she had trodden upon was auriferous ; her very dreams had been golden. She had been brought up all her life, as indeed had been Mr. Tremenhere, in the worship of wealth, which has a cult, just as rank and position have ; only, instead of the ‘Peerage’ and the ‘County Families,’ ‘plums’ and ‘warmth’ are the objects of adoration. This respectable sect place the possessors of a hundred thousand pounds, of five hundred thousand, and so on, where lords and dukes are put in the other scale. In Mrs. Linden’s eyes Mr. Joseph Tremenhere was a prince of the blood, because he was said to have a million of money ; if he had died worth all that, he would have seemed to her to enter into a sort of Walhalla, and she would have spoken of him ever after with a hushed reverence. But she hoped he would not die, but live to make her Mrs. Tremenhere, that she might shine by his reflected splendour. Except for that, her regard for him was as unselfish as that of any village maiden for her swain ; she would not have asked for a pennyworth of settlement ; and underneath all that yellow mud she had a tender heart.

‘How beautiful your little Fairy is looking, dear Mr. Tremenhere !’ she had been saying with genuine admiration, as, emerging with him from the refreshment tent, her eyes fell on the girl and her body-guard. ‘If I were you I should feel quite nervous at having so bright a jewel in charge.’

‘Grace is as good as she is pretty,’ said the money-lender in a tone that was not only confident but had something of reproof in it.

‘No doubt, as good as gold. But her very simplicity and ignorance of her own attractions have danger in them.’

‘That is true,’ said Mr. Tremenhere. It was even truer than she thought ; he felt that it was his duty—some day—to point out to his little Fairy, that, kind and tender as he seemed to her, he could—and would—be inflexible as iron in certain circumstances ; on an occasion too, perhaps, when she might have expected him to be soft as wax ; but he shrank from showing her a side of his character which, though so often turned to others, she had never beheld.

‘You are a woman and have keen eyes,’ he continued gravely ; ‘do you suspect danger—I mean from any particular quarter?’

‘I would rather not answer that question, Mr. Tremenhere.’

'But I insist upon it, Mrs. Linden; my child has no mother.'

'That is an appeal I cannot resist,' she interrupted hastily; 'but I am no meddler, and hate to make mischief, and, moreover, I may be quite wrong. There is also another reason which disinclines me to speak.'

'Out with it! let us get that over first,' he said. His manner was more brusque even than usual; it concealed an anxiety.

'Perhaps, Mr. Tremenhere, what I am about to say would not be to your taste. You have strong likings as well as prejudices. I do not wish to suffer in your opinion by going counter to one of them.'

'You shall not suffer; even if you are wrong, I shall be your debtor, Mrs. Linden. Who is it you suspect?'

'I suspect no one. But, in my judgment, the most likely quarter for danger to Grace to come is the one in which you have placed most confidence.'

'He dares not,' replied Mr. Tremenhere in low, hoarse tones. It was unnecessary to mention names, for his own eyes and those of his companion were fixed, while they were speaking, upon the man in question. He was standing with smiling lip, stroking a whisker 'as the rabbit fondles his own harmless face,' between the two ladies, and making himself agreeable as it seemed to both of them.

'There is nothing in my opinion that he dares not do,' was Mrs. Linden's quiet rejoinder. 'His will is as strong as yours, and he is very subtle.'

'You are right so far, but you do not understand how well he understands me. Moreover, if what you imagine were the fact, Agnes, who is as sharp-eyed as yourself, would not fail to discover it.'

There was a reply on Mrs. Linden's lips which, if expressed, would have surprised her companion very much; but it never passed them.

'Agnes suspects nothing because she deems her sister still a child,' she answered after a moment's pause. 'That very circumstance, however, may be to Grace's disadvantage. She may come under his influence without knowing it, and the knowledge may come too late.'

It would have been impossible to guess from Mr. Tremenhere's face that the suspicion of this very thing had already occurred to him, and that not an hour ago; but he nodded and

jerked his hand out in a manner that informed Mrs. Linden, who had studied his sign language to some purpose, that what she had said to him had had its weight, and would be attended to. His anger, however, must have been great, since even the presence of his little Fairy did not prevent his addressing his subordinate, when he came up with him, in the harshest tone.

‘What are you hanging about here for, Roscoe, instead of making yourself useful about the place?’

Mr. Roscoe looked quite unmoved, and, as Agnes knew, was perfectly well able to answer for himself under much more trying circumstances; but to have him thus spoken to in the hearing of Mrs. Linden was unendurable to her.

‘If there is any one to blame,’ she interposed, ‘blame me; for it was at my request that Mr. Roscoe kept us company.’

It was the first time she had ever evinced to her father the smallest interest in that gentleman, and she regretted the speech the instant she had uttered it.

Mr. Tremenhere, however, did not appear displeased, and seemed even mollified by it. His suspicions had taken another direction, and were monopolised by another object.

‘In that case,’ he said coldly, ‘I will take Mr. Roscoe’s place;’ and, so saying, he dismissed him with a wave of his hand.

Mrs. Linden dowered Agnes with a smile of such quiet significance as that young lady would have liked to recompense by strangling her on the spot.

Even in the richest households there are drawbacks to perfect happiness, and there was more than one skeleton in the closet at Lebanon Lodge, the existence of which it was highly desirable should not be suspected by an outsider.

CHAPTER V.

THE WARNING.

IT was Mr. Tremenhere’s custom, when the labours of each day were over, to write down the result of them in a certain ledger, furnished with great locks like a prison door, in company with his faithful assistant, Mr. Roscoe. The place of meeting of these two recording angels was a small upper room (such as could not be spied upon), furnished like a bank parlour, and in which more

money (in paper) was wont nightly to change hands than in the saloons of Monaco, and with a much greater percentage in favour of ‘the table.’ Even when there had been but little business done, they would still meet together and concert benevolent schemes for getting this and that poor fellow out of his difficulties, and also for recompensing themselves for their trouble in the matter. It was not done in the prim stiff way in which affairs are—sometimes—conducted in the City, but over cigars and brandy and soda; and these discussions, especially so far as Josh was concerned, were carried on with much dramatic force and freedom from convention. These two spiders, working in the same web, were in strong contrast to each other; the one somewhat bloated and unwieldy, but uncommonly deft and keen, and the other lank and agile, and quick to supply a thread where it was wanted, and the gluten to fix it.

Even after the birthday party at Lebanon Lodge they met as usual, though a trifle later; for, because a day had been spent in conviviality, it by no means followed with these diligent workers that no ‘operation’ had been effected. From the flower Pleasure it was quite as much their habit to pluck the blossom Business as from the more ordinary sources; the nettle Danger was more often bound up in it in that case than usual, and required their more particular attention.

Mr. Tremenhere’s face was graver to-night than customary, and had even a sullen look, which, to do him justice, it rarely wore. If he was not the best-mannered man that ever picked pocket, as some eulogist described him, who knew perhaps more of pickpocketing than of manners, he was of a much more genial nature than could be expected from any one in his line of business; he had his likings, not altogether misplaced, and was always more willing to do a kindness that cost him nothing than an injury. He was not an honourable man, of course; there were legal authorities of high standing who had pronounced him dishonest; but he was not one of your mean and miserly money-lenders. His huge fortune had not been built up by scraping and paring; it was even said that from bones on which he had found unexpected pickings he had sometimes taken less than he might have done, though that idea perhaps owed its origin to the love of romance which, I am thankful to say, pervades every section of society. But he liked his comforts, and never allowed himself to be put out by a small thing. Yet it was a small thing, as Mr. Roscoe thought, that had

put his companion out to-night, and, as his custom was, he at once grappled with it. His own marvellous power of intuition was one of the things, as he well knew, for which his lord and master valued him; and he never shrank, as a mere subordinate would have done, from treading on a tender place, or hinting that the other had here and there been less sagacious in his proceedings than became him.

'General St. Gatien tells me that you are going to let him have that money,' he observed quietly as he lit his cigar.

Even in his talks with his patron, Mr. Roscoe always gave his clients their full title, whereas Josh was terribly at his ease in Zion, and would speak of persons of the highest position with the most shocking familiarity.

'Of course you know best (a phrase he never used unless he was quite sure the other was in the wrong), but in my opinion the General is a squeezed lemon.'

Mr. Tremenhere threw out his hand in his contemptuous fashion.

'Damn St. Gatien!' he said; 'I'm going to have a word or two with *you*!'

Roscoe had a command over his features which would have fitted him for a diplomatist or a poker player of the highest order; but, though he raised his eyebrows and looked up in his companion's face with well-affected surprise, he felt the tell-tale colour in his cheeks as he did so.

'If you are deceiving me, Edward Roscoe,' continued Mr. Tremenhere, speaking with a sternness that was almost savage in its intensity, and gazing at him with angry eyes, 'it will be the worst piece of work you ever did for yourself—by Heaven, it will!'

'Deceiving you, Mr. Tremenhere?' His tone was one of sheer amazement, but still the tell-tale blood would not be kept down, but rose and rose till it sang 'traitor' in his very ears.

'Have I taken you from the gutter, I wonder, and clothed and taught and fed you, only that you should turn like an ungrateful cur, and snap at my hand?—for you cannot bite me, sir, you cannot *bite* me. *No!*'

The speaker's excitement was extreme, and made the greater impression on his companion, because such a state of mind in his patron was without a precedent. The fear which filled Mr. Roscoe's mind was also as great a stranger there. He had secrets of his

own—and damaging ones—but if all of them (save one) had been discovered, he would have met his accusers with a front of brass. The question that stirred his scheming soul to its muddy depths was, ‘Had that *one* been discovered?’ No! if it had been, he would have been by this time in the street with Mr. Tremenhere’s door closed for ever behind him; but, nevertheless, it might be suspected; nothing less, he felt, than such a suspicion could have moved his patron thus.

‘I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Tremenhere; I cannot defend myself, since you are striking me in the dark. I only know that you are doing me a grievous wrong.’

‘It may be so, I hope it is—for your sake, not for mine, sir, be sure of that. I say again, it does not lie within the power of man to hurt me; I have no weak point—none.’

His appearance physically was not corroborative of this statement. His huge and flabby frame shook from head to foot; his eyes were bloodshot; and on his forehead there was a ghastly dew. Under circumstances less affecting his own vital interests Mr. Roscoe would have been seriously alarmed for his patron; but for the moment it behoved him to look to himself alone, and be armed at all points, though indeed, if the stroke he awaited should be that he had in his mind, even his ready skill and buckler of bull’s hide would little avail him.

‘I am here to ask you nothing,’ continued the money-lender after a long pause; ‘for if you are guilty, I know I should only meet with lies.’

It was not a complimentary observation, but, to the person addressed, it gave more satisfaction than under other circumstances any eulogy could have done. He uttered a silent sigh of relief, and bowed his head with Eastern humility—behaviour so foreign to his character, that, if his companion had not been blinded with passion, it might have itself betrayed him.

‘I am here, Edward Roscoe, to warn you for the first time and the last. You think yourself my right hand, and I do not deny your use; you trade on it, I know, and I don’t blame you; you have lived on the crumbs that have fallen from my table, and grown fat upon them; let that content you. Beware of interfering between me and mine!’

‘Then it *is* so,’ was the other’s inward thought; ‘he *does* suspect it.’ He dared not meet his patron’s eye, but, looking critically at his cigar (which was natural enough, since it had gone

out, but that he did not notice), replied deferentially, ‘I have no remembrance of ever having done so, Mr. Tremenhere.’

‘Knowing me as you do,’ continued the money-lender, without paying any attention to this disclaimer, ‘you are aware, I suppose, that if any one of those men who were in this house to-day, men of rank and birth, and some of them not without expectations, which no one knows better than myself how to realise, was to ask one of my daughters in marriage, what sort of answer he would get from me?’

‘I know that he might just as well ask for the moon,’ replied the other dryly.

‘And if, notwithstanding that reply, he should put his design into execution, and persuade the silly girl to marry him, you know too what would happen then?’

‘Nothing would happen,’ returned Mr. Roscoe, forcing a smile, ‘except that he would have found a wife. She would not, as I can well believe, be the heiress he had looked for.’

‘Heiress!’ hissed the money-lender; ‘while I lived she would not have a penny, and when I was dead she would have a shilling—just a shilling to show that I had not forgotten her.’

‘Indeed, sir, I think it very probable.’

‘Probable? It would most certainly happen. My money shall never, *never*’—here he struck the table with his large, nerveless hand, as a fishmonger smites his slab with a flat fish—‘feed the insatiable maw of any spendthrift—no, not if he could make my girl a duchess. Do you think, then, it is likely that a low-born schemer, who, notwithstanding his shrewd wits, and contempt for ne'er-do-wells, himself runs risks I *know*, and looks to become wealthy in a moment by a lucky stroke on 'change, would have a better chance of enriching himself by the same means at my expense?’

Such an insult might have brought the blood to any man’s cheek, but it was not the insult that turned that of him to whom it was addressed to crimson.

‘Such a character as you describe, Mr. Tremenhere,’ he answered quietly, ‘would have most certainly no chance at all.’

‘You are right. Lay your own words to heart and profit by them. Stop!’—for the other was about to speak—‘there is one thing more. Notwithstanding the conviction you have expressed, it is possible that you may entertain an illusion. You may think—though you ought to know me better—that notwithstanding what I have said

on this matter, and how fully purposed I am in my own mind about it, there is a weak point through which you may reach my heart and gain your ends. "There is his little Fairy," you may be saying to yourself, "who is dearer to him than all his wealth, and whom he would never doom to—what he most despises and detests himself—a life of poverty. If I could wind myself into her affection, and secure her for my own, he would forgive her, though he would never forgive *me*. Sooner or later he would come to terms; on his death-bed at least he would send for her, and say, 'You are my daughter still"'; if you are thinking that, Edward Roscoe, you are in a Fool's Paradise indeed."

While his patron was thus speaking, the flush had gradually left the other's cheek; a certain rigidity of limb, caused by some extreme tension of the nerves, had also disappeared; except that he experienced a sense of relief instead of pain, he was like a man who recovers from a fainting fit, and, though not unconscious of a danger narrowly escaped, begins to feel himself again.

"Mr. Tremenhere," he replied, in a tone more grave than ordinary, but without a trace of his recent humility, "you amaze me. I say nothing of the infamy that is pre-supposed in the monstrous offence which you would by implication impute to me, except that it is of so vile a character that, even with your low opinion of human nature, I feel confident it did not originate in your own mind. None but a woman, who had her own ends to serve, could have conceived it."

"Never you mind how it got there," answered the other curtly. "It *is* there."

"I see it is; I see that your mind has been poisoned against me. Let it be so. Think anything of me that you please. Let me be as base and faithless to the trust you have placed in me as malice can paint. But, remember, in so doing you impute ingratitude and disobedience to one whom you *know* to be incapable of such offences, an innocent and loving child."

"Pooh, pooh!" answered the other contemptuously. "None of your heroics, sir. Of course she is innocent, but she is no longer a child. You sent her flowers to-day."

"Her birthday! Even if I had sent her diamonds, it would have been no such matter. I should not have dreamt of your objecting to it. She has been "Grace" to me ever since I have known her; but henceforward she shall be "Miss Grace," like her sisters. You were kind enough to say just now that anything I

might allege in my own defence—against a charge of which I knew nothing, and as little expected it to be *this* as one of arson—would probably be lies. Ask, then, Miss Grace herself what I have said to her, how I have behaved to her, so long as she can remember. That I have not been truthful to her may be justly urged against me; but did you wish me to be truthful to her? When she asked her simple, ignorant questions about her father's calling—'

'Be silent, sir,' interrupted the money-lender savagely, 'and let my Grace alone!'

'As you please, Mr. Tremenhere, though it seems hard that a man's mouth should be closed on the very matter which would establish his innocence. However, since that is forbidden ground, and also as it seems you think me knave enough for anything, the only line of defence that is left me is to plead that, if guilty, I am not responsible for my actions. If I have entertained such a project as has been suggested by you, I must certainly be stark staring mad. I put aside the fact that I am double the young lady's age, and totally unfitted by my position to induce her (if the subject of matrimony has ever entered her mind, which I do not believe) to waste a thought on me; I only urge this argument, that, since I have been your confidential clerk for many years, I know something of your character; and what I have gathered from my study of it is that, so far from your affection for your youngest daughter being likely to mitigate in your eye any such act of folly and disobedience on her part, it would add fuel to fire. You are not a man to be crossed in anything on which you have set your mind; but where you have set your heart, opposition, if I read you aright, would turn it from stone to steel. Knave let me be, if it is your pleasure to consider me such; but, whether blinded by your own passion or hoodwinked by another, I cannot believe that you have been brought to think Edward Roscoe a born fool.'

These words flowed with a force and earnestness that, if they were feigned, would have proved the speaker to be a consummate actor indeed; the expression of his face, as he stood steadily confronting the other, was almost contemptuous in its defiant confidence; his air had lost all its habitual secretiveness and reserve, and manifested, what had probably never been seen in it before, an honest indignation.

'It may be as you say, sir; I hope it is,' was the cold rejoinder.

'I have made no accusation against you, and I do not regret my word of warning—I have done.'

These last words were uttered thickly and indistinctly, and had a terrible significance for the ear that heard them. The speaker's face had turned purple, and had a look in it which agitated his companion with a strange mixture of hope and fear.

'You are not well, Mr. Tremenhere?'

A sharp and bitter cry broke from the lips of the money-lender as he sank backwards in his chair.

In a moment Roscoe was at his side, unloosing his neckcloth. It was an involuntary action, and, after he had performed it, he remained motionless as a statue; his eye mechanically sought the bottle of brandy, but his hand did not move towards it. He stood watching his master like a dog (but with no such faithful or anxious look), and with his ear on the stretch for any external sound. Would that scream have roused the house, he was wondering, or had no one heard it? Presently the money-lender opened his eyes. 'Brandy!' he gasped. With steady hand the other poured out a glassful and gave it him, like medicine to a child. The stimulant revived him.

'Tell no one of this,' he murmured. Roscoe inclined his head. 'If I had not thought such would have been your wish,' he answered gently, 'I should have called assistance.'

'You did quite right—another!'

'I am afraid you have been in great pain, sir,' said the other, as he obeyed him.

'Pain doesn't express it; it was torture—agony.'

'For the moment you lost your breath, I fear.'

'It was not breathlessness; it was annihilation.'

He felt for his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

'That was the dew of death, Roscoe. But for you—he had caught sight of the neckcloth on his knee—I should have been gone; I shall not forget it.'

'You make much of a trifle, Mr. Tremenhere.'

'A trifle, you call it! By George, let me tell you it was Touch and Go!'

There was no occasion to tell Mr. Roscoe that. He was fully conscious of the serious nature of his companion's seizure, and also that, for the time at least, there was no further danger to be apprehended from it. The money-lender's face had assumed its normal complexion—not a particularly wholesome one, it is true,

but with no resemblance, such as it had so lately worn, to that of a man half-strangled ; it was curious, too, how, with returning life, his old manner of speech had been resumed, which, but now, in view of the Beckoning Hand, had been so apprehensively grave.

'Yes, you've had your warning, and I've had mine, the same evening,' he continued grimly ; 'but mine was a real notice to quit. What fools we are, even the sharpest of us !' he added in a low voice.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Tremenhere ; I did not catch what you were saying.'

'Never mind, it was not worth catching. Now I shall do.' And he looked towards his bedroom door, which communicated with the sitting-room.

'I don't think you ought to be left, sir,' returned the other ; 'it will be no inconvenience to me to sleep here on the sofa, so as to hear you if you called.'

The words were couched in dry mechanical tones, little in accordance with the sympathy they suggested, and the speaker kept his eyes upon the floor as he uttered them. Perhaps it was some sense of shortcoming in his manner, or even some expression in that downcast face, which the other was regarding very sharply, that caused Mr. Tremenhere to decline this offer, and without thanks.

'No, no, I shall be better alone,' he said with abrupt decision. 'Good night !'

'Very good.' Mr. Roscoe lit his candle and left the room. His patron listened for a moment as though to make sure the other had gone away, then moved to the door, and softly locked and bolted it.

'My nerves are thoroughly upset,' he muttered to himself. 'What could he hope to get by murdering me ? That woman was wrong, too, I'm pretty sure, about his having any designs on Grace ; still he might have had, and in that case, if I had died to-night—well, there shall be no more risks ; to-morrow it shall be done.' There was a large bookcase in the room filled mostly with legal works, and on the top shelf an encyclopædia in many volumes ; he took down volume 1 and turned to a certain article. 'This disease,' it said, 'is characterised by intense pain and sense of constriction ; the paroxysms begin with the breastbone and extend to the shoulder. The fits recur, and the patient dies in one of them.' 'I thought so.' He put the book back carefully in its place, and

reseated himself in his chair. ‘I must not allow myself, it seems, to be put out by things as I was to-day. There will be no occasion to be put out when one has guarded against all possible consequences. And in the meantime nothing shall disturb me.’ Nevertheless, though there was no recurrence of his malady, Mr. Tremenhere was a good deal disturbed that night. His sleep was broken, and once, an hour or two after he had retired to rest, he thought he heard the handle of his sitting-room door turned; but that, no doubt, as he assured himself, was fancy. With the morning light he was almost himself again; the impression of what he had suffered was still upon him, but greatly weakened; and though he was no less determined to put into effect the resolution he had formed the previous night, there seemed no such pressing occasion for it. That information in the encyclopædia was doubtless correct enough, but it might not apply to him. Since doubt, however, had become a factor in his case, there were two things to be done instead of one.

PILGRIMS TO MECCA.

EVERY year thousands upon thousands of pious believers in the name of Mohamed desert their homesteads and wend their way, both by land and by sea, towards the country that saw the birth of their religion and witnessed the miraculous deeds of their arch-prophet. From China, India, and Persia ; from every quarter of the Turkish Empire ; from Egypt, Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco ; from Zanzibar and Senegal ; from Kurdistan and Afghanistan ; from the Soudan and the great Sahara, and from many other places whose existence we Europeans are but dimly conscious of, they throng—mostly poor, ignorant, and dirty, but devout and determined in their purpose. They are pilgrims to the holy cities of Arabia, Mecca and Medina, and to reach them they starve themselves for years to save up sufficient money to defray their expenses, and endure horrible privations by the way. They commit themselves to the mercies of the vast and awe-inspiring sea, dreaded by all true Easterns ; they risk being robbed by the Bedouins or killed by the heat—and all with an amount of phlegm and good humour that is almost sublime. Whatever happens to them they care not ; God will provide for them, and should they die on their way out they will be received all the more readily into the mansions and the arms of the voluptuous houris already provided for each one of them by their much-beloved prophet in the seven-storied paradise of Islam.

Last year (1888) the Great Hadi, or principal day when all the pilgrims have to unite in worship at Mecca, took place on Friday, August 17. It usually occurs about this time, but the exact date varies, and is fixed annually by the religious authorities at Mecca. It is incumbent on all good Moslems to perform this pilgrimage at least once, if they can afford it. Many perform it several times, and some make a business of it, and hire themselves out as substitutes for others ; for a pilgrimage by proxy is considered to be as effective as one performed in person, provided that the person in whose behalf it is performed be dead. No one can hire a substitute during his lifetime, but he may leave a provision to that effect in his will. This pilgrimage must not be considered in the light of a penance,

after which the Hadji is to receive a plenary indulgence for past sins. It is an ordinance of the religion of Islam, of the same nature as our Eucharist, whereby the believer is supposed to be brought into closer communion for the time being with the Deity and his human representative. Of course it is easy enough to declare that one is not able to afford the expense of the undertaking—and many, without the least odium being attached to them, excuse themselves on that plea—for it is expressly ordered that no man unable to pay his own way without being an incumbrance to any one else should attempt it. The necessary expenses vary according to the station of the Hadji. A poor man starting from the shores of Persia could perform the whole pilgrimage and get back for about 350 rupees, or about 23*l.* 10*s.* of our money—according to the present relative value of the rupee and sovereign at Bushire, the chief seaport of Persia. A person of any consequence would probably spend 1,000 rupees; and of course a rich man could, if he liked, spend a much larger sum. Yet not much opportunity for display is allowed. All around Mecca there are certain places, forming a circle round the city, after passing which the pilgrimage begins in earnest. For men no covering is allowed but a couple of white towels or bits of calico sheeting, one fastened round the waist and the other thrown over the shoulder. On women, also, no jewel or ornament of any description is tolerated—robes of snow-white linen constitute their only apparel.

It is a mistake to suppose that women are not considered fit to take part in this important religious duty, or, indeed, in any religious services whatever. There is a prevalent idea amongst us that Moslems do not allow to their women the possession of souls. This is a mistake. It may be to the point to mention that I am writing this in Busrah, on the Euphrates, and that just as I finished writing the last sentence a sheikh of great learning and influence in this place came in, and on asking him the question, he gives me to understand that in the eyes of God women stand on the same footing as regards a future life as men, and that women are allowed to enter a mosque and pray therein; but that it is not customary for them to do so. This summer I accompanied a steamer carrying pilgrims from the Mediterranean and from the Persian Gulf to Jeddah, and amongst them we had quite a large number of women. One middle-aged lady—a person of great importance, for she was one of the wives of a powerful Persian sheikh—I have heard holding forth to quite a

crowd of male listeners outside the impromptu tent that shielded her from their view, on the deepest mysteries of the Unknowable with the same surprising assurance, and utter contempt of all logic, as if she had been one of our own fair countrywomen, and had just returned from morning service. It may be interesting to know that in Persia if a rich woman marries she retains complete control over all her property ; if she dies without issue it returns to her parents, or she may will a part of it to her husband ; if she has a child the whole goes to it at her death, whether it be a boy or a girl ; if she has two children, one a boy and the other a girl, the boy gets two-thirds, and the girl one-third—the husband is entitled to nothing.

These women are not such complete slaves to their husbands as is generally supposed. A Moorish officer we took to Jeddah from Tangiers had his wife with him. She was his only wife, and, though only eighteen years of age, had been married to him five years, and had had three children, one of whom was dead, and the other two alive and left behind at their home in Fez, whence they came. He had twice before performed the Hadj, and each time had been accompanied by his young wife. This time they were taking her mother with them ; and indeed the thoughtful and considerate way in which he treated them occasioned me a good deal of surprise. This bigoted Mussulman—looked upon by his European brethren as a jealous tyrant of women, as one utterly incapable of appreciating their higher qualities, and merely using them as means wherewith to gratify his coarse passions—could certainly have shamed many of them in this matter. The ship was lying in the bay about a mile from the city of Tangiers ; the sea was running pretty high, and long before they came alongside, both ladies were very sick. Gently he lifted them on board and laid them down in a quiet corner, whilst he rushed about to seek the best place on deck whereon to fix his tent. Then he tore open his packages, and drew out from them carpets and pillows and curtains, and in a short while a well-fitted tent was ready, and into it he carried the two women and laid them down and made them comfortable. There they lay till the next day, as much like two bundles of clothes as anything else, for even their faces and hands were invisible, and I really believe they did not move once, although in a few hours, as soon as we had got through the Straits and entered the Mediterranean, the sea became perfectly calm ; and a great deal of their

indisposition must have been of that inexplicable nature which would have tried the patience of many a Christian husband considerably. But he busied himself about and lit a fire, and presently turned out a nice little dinner, and didn't lose his temper a bit because they would have none of it, but only gazed sorrowfully at the provisions that were to be wasted. Then he made them some tea, and then some coffee, and left nothing untried in the whole category of things to make them comfortable, patiently sitting there fanning them, or anon starting up to get them some water or any other thing they might want. When, the next morning, the ladies had been induced to look over the side of the ship, and had convinced themselves that the sea was as calm as it possibly could be, and that therefore they could not any longer be sick, then did they bestir themselves and do their proper work in attending to the house and doing the cooking. They took great pride in making the tent look clean and neat, and altogether they seemed a very happy couple.

These pilgrims scramble on board with great agility, and with no regard whatever for dignity or decency. A ladder, of course, is always welcome; but if one is not handy, they are quite capable of swarming up ropes, or climbing up the sides. If the women are unable to help themselves, they are handed up like any other bundles. For an hour or two after the decks give one the idea of a pandemonium of yelling demons. Everybody seems to be fighting with everybody else; screams of distress, yells of furious anger, threats and prayers, curses and blessings, succeed each other in bewildering and ludicrous confusion. The gesticulation is startling. Arabs certainly excel Frenchmen in this accomplishment. The disturbance, whilst it lasts, is something awful, and is produced by the search after and identification of baggage and selection of sites for erecting tents or spreading carpets. Women are no less forward in this business than they are in any other, even amongst us. One fat old negress we took up at Tangiers came on board, and instantly took a fancy to a part of the deck which three grave long-bearded Moors had taken possession of the night before. Furiously she ordered them away, and as at first they seemed too much lost in astonishment to comply with her modest request, she proceeded to give them a practical demonstration of her meaning by preparing to pull up the carpets on which they were sitting. On this they started up and not only let her take the best spot for herself and her hus-

band, who stood by looking on in a half-frightened manner, but also served her submissively in bringing up her boxes and massing them around her, whilst she squatted on her haunches and treated them to her views of things in general.

One Turkish lady came on board at Busrah, with a husband who was stricken with ague. She had herself the appearance of one who in her younger days had possessed considerable beauty; but at present she was most remarkable for her stature and the length of her arms. Until we got up steam and glided down the river she was certainly the most conspicuous figure on the decks: wherever the din was greatest, or the aspect of things most threatening, her black shroud could be plainly distinguished, and her arms, wildly sawing the surrounding atmosphere in frantic expostulations or soul-withering imprecations, gave her the appearance of an inspired windmill! Yet under all this she possessed as kind a heart, and a nature as sensitive to the sufferings of others, as any of her decorous and tender sisters of the West, and the attention she lavished on her sickly husband, and the efforts she was continually making to alleviate the discomforts of any one else unwell near her, won for her a general regard. A few days after we arrived at Jeddah, this woman met the captain and myself walking in the bazaar. She stopped us with an exclamation of delight and surprise, and asked us how we were, and when we were going away, and showered blessings down on our heads, all in a breath, when suddenly a donkey passing too near her person, gave her an unexpected push, which considerably disturbed the equilibrium both of her body and her temper. Turning round rapidly, with a sudden and startling change of expression on her face, she administered to the man following the donkey, whose remissness in not calling her attention to the approaching quadruped had been the cause of her discomfiture, one of the neatest and most effective back-handed slaps on the nape of his neck I have ever had the pleasure of witnessing, for with a yell of anguish he sprawled incontinently on his stomach, and in that undignified position received the volley of oaths she hurled at him. Not satisfied with this, she suddenly sprang after the donkey, and, with a clever movement of her hands, dislodged the load it was carrying, and sent it off at a lazy trot by means of a well-directed kick; whilst its unfortunate driver sprang up and took to his heels amidst the jeers and laughter of the onlookers, squatting on their benches in the adjoining cafés. Then with a

countenance as composed and unruffled as if this singular performance had been but a dream on my part, she turned to us again and continued the conversation, and gave us the last news of herself and her husband, and told us that that very night they were starting off for Mecca.

Fights are not uncommon when the pilgrims first come on board. This happened to us at a place on the Persian side of the Euphrates called Failiyah, when the passengers from this place set upon some others from Bagdad, and then ensued a beautiful scrimmage for a while, until our agent's clerk, who is stout and of a gouty build, and who had been perspiring freely with emotion at the sight, suddenly lost command over himself, and, seizing hold of a tremendous spar that lay close by, charged full tilt into the very midst of them, like another Don Quixote de la Mancha. This proceeding spread such consternation amongst the combatants that incontinently they left off, swore eternal friendship, kissed one another on both cheeks, and proceeded to look after their dead and wounded.

It is oftentimes not undesirable that such quarrels should arise, for if divided by dissensions amongst themselves, they are less likely to give any trouble to the captain and the crew. This is not a matter of small importance, or one to be treated lightly or with scorn. There have been such things as general risings amongst these pilgrims, when the officers and crew have had to defend themselves with their revolvers and such other arms as they possessed, as best they could. Individual cases are not uncommon when on some slight provocation the glittering knife of a fanatic has been buried deep in the flesh of an unbelieving dog of a Nazarene. My own experience does not embrace any such unpleasant occurrences; on the contrary, we were quite friendly. But no one who knows the wild fanatic and suspicious nature of these people, and the hatred they bear to the Christian, and the thousand and one little causes of friction between them and the crew daily in operation, can consider such events as very improbable. We had plenty of arms, though we never used them; but our best safeguard, no doubt, was, that in each trip we made with them they belonged to various sects and to various countries. And amongst these semi-barbarous people the principle of distrust and latent enmity between different clans or tribes obtains to a high degree. It is not long since they were at open war with each other, and the slightest incident serves to rekindle

the old feud. The people we took up at Tangiers were composed of two separate parties, one of which was located on the fore half, and the other on the after half, of the upper deck. The Moorish officer I have before mentioned belonged to the latter, and his tent, always kept in perfect order and cleanliness by his busy little wife, had something of a palatial appearance beside the squalor and dirt of the other tenements. The people on the fore-hatch were a particularly dirty lot, and their spleen appears to have been excited by the sight of so much prosperity and order. Especially, it appears, were the women moved to anger ; for the ladies of the tent would have nothing to do with them, and they were greatly exasperated by the assumption of such airs, and determined to make it manifest to all the world that they considered themselves equal in every respect to them. So one day, whilst the officer himself was far away leaning over the bows and watching the ship cleaving its way through the blue water, and the innumerable jelly-fish, two or three of the women from the fore-half came to the tent on the pretext of a visit, and made themselves obtrusively at home, and presently went so far as to request the loan of certain utensils, such as a teapot, pans, &c., for their own use. On this being refused, they began to be abusive in their language, and then they were pitched out by the mother-in-law and one or two others. The mother-in-law was furious, for one of the women, who had a green veil over her head, had addressed herself to her in particularly dirty and filthy language—indeed, the curses and terms of hatred in common use amongst these people are unequalled as examples of refined obscenity. Although the latter had been bundled off to her own part of the ship, she was not satisfied. She fetched out a bludgeon, evidently manufactured in the first instance for the purpose of manslaughter, with a knob on it as big as a good-sized water-melon. With this, as far as we could gather from her incoherent language, she intended to damage that green veil somewhat. To appease her, or to hold her, was impossible ; five women sat on her to no purpose, and finally, as a last resource, she was muffled up in mattresses and carpets, and a couple of heavy boxes put over all to keep her down, and there she lay venting her passion in hysterical screams. The officer now arrived on the scene of battle, and a discussion took place as to what was to be done. Meanwhile the other women had returned to their people, and, by their lamentations and the description of the treatment they had just received, greatly excited their wrath.

One young fellow in particular seemed deeply moved. He spoke not a word, but glared to such good purpose that on the spot he became affected with a permanent squint, and, seizing a big stick, advanced grimly aft. Hardly had he passed the engine-room when he was disarmed, cast down, and had we not rescued him, his life would have been cut short in its early prime. Special measures were then taken to prevent people from either side crossing over; but it was not till some time after that all danger of a general conflagration had disappeared.

There are amongst the Moslems two great divisions, the Sunnites and the Sheites. The Turks are all Sunnites, the Persians all Sheites. They differ in that the latter regard Ali, the nephew and son-in-law of Mohamed, with greater love than they do Mohamed himself. Ali married Fatima, Mohamed's daughter, and by her had two sons, Hassan and Husein. It is said that Mohamed predicted their death; and indeed one day Ali and his two sons, and a large number of friends and adherents, were massacred. The Sheites declare that Mohamed encompassed their death, and to this day the two sects hate each other even more than they do the Christians. The anniversary of this fatal day is celebrated religiously every year amongst the Sheites. They gather in groups around a certain man, who, seated in their midst on some elevated spot, begins the recital in a monotone of the tragedy. Gradually he warms up, he becomes excited, he throws up his hands, he even sobs with anguish as he proceeds and graphically describes the misfortunes of the ill-fated Ali and his two sons. And his audience, with downcast eyes reverently shaded with their hands, follow with all-absorbing interest his words. Presently they begin to sob, and finally to cry aloud with anguish and beat their heads and breasts and tear their hair. The reciter sways his audience with thronging words of passion, with soft whispers of entreaty, with broken ejaculations of agony. Then suddenly his mood changes. What has passed has been a confession of their sin and a confession of the justice of any punishment that might fall on them. For the Sheites were originally Sunnites and approved of the death of Ali, and it was only later that they became Sheites and seceded from the Sunnites; and by this ceremony they lament over and expiate the sins of their forefathers. And now succeeds earnest prayer with upraised hands to God to receive Ali and his sons into favour and to pardon them in His mercy. Then, when this is finished, narghilehs or bubble-

bubbles are handed round, and the whole company enjoy a quiet smoke to calm their excited feelings. In some places knives are made use of, and fearful wounds self-inflicted, and in some cases death has resulted. Last year (1888) the anniversary was on September 10. But with the pilgrims we had this ceremony continually, night and day, until it became a nuisance, and orders were given that after 8 P.M. no more noise should be made. Yet, strange to say, whilst accusing him of this murder and condemning his action, the Sheites do not deny that Mohamed is the true and only prophet of God. With the Sunnites Ali and his sons are of no account.

We were agreeably surprised to find these pilgrims not half so dirty in their habits as we had been led to expect. Even the Persians, who are supposed to be the worst in this respect, were not so bad. With a few exceptions—and we carried several hundreds of them—they came on board with clothes clean and in good order. They were always willing to clear the decks of their belongings, in order to allow of their being washed, though this was necessarily attended with a good deal of trouble and inconvenience to themselves. They washed their hands and faces every time before and after food, and frequently bathed themselves. Some that we brought from Tangiers were filthy and lousy; their only garment consisted of a sort of sack, with one aperture to allow of the passage of the head, and two others for the arms. These cloaks are hideous, and had apparently lasted them for a long time. But they had come from the wilds of the great Sahara, and were little better than savages. One old gentleman from Senegal could speak French with the fluency of a Parisian; he was the blackest negro I have ever seen, with the figure and muscles of a Hercules, and looked a grand sight as he strutted about the decks in a magnificent robe of orange-coloured silk and a bright scarlet fez. He was treated with consideration by the others, and apparently was of consequence in his own country. Withal he was a pleasant-spoken man, and could converse intelligently on general subjects.

These pilgrims do not take long to make the acquaintance of those settled in their immediate vicinity; and thus soon the whole crowd is split up into separate and distinct groups. Each group messes in company, prays in company, reads the Kéran in company, smokes in company, and drinks tea in company. These are the principal occupations during the voyage, but most

important is the tea-drinking. They are always at it, especially the Persians. They have very good tea, and drink it in small glasses, with lime-juice instead of milk. The Moors flavour their tea with mint. They are most generous in the way of offering to others anything that they may themselves be eating; but this is rather a nuisance, for their cooking is not suited to European palates, and one has to be very careful not to offend them in refusing.

I have said before that all around Mecca there are certain points after passing which the pilgrimage begins in earnest. By sea from the north this is at Arába; from the south at Yelúmlum. On reaching these places they put off their ordinary clothes, bathe themselves, shave their heads, and put on snow-white garments, in the case of men these consisting of only two towels or bits of calico. The Sheites, on arriving opposite Yelúmlum, whilst the ship stops for the space of five minutes, shout out a sort of doxology, which, as each group has its own time and its own key, is very distressing to those who have any delicacy of aural perception, and are not carried away by the same religious fervour which appears at this moment to have bereft them of their senses. After this ceremony, and until the pilgrimage is over, they are not allowed to wear any other garment, nor shoes, nor head covering. Sandals they may wear, but with nothing to cover the feet. Whilst at rest they can make use of umbrellas, but whilst progressing towards Mecca they must trust to Allah, and not shield themselves from the sun. Some time ago the question arose whether it was lawful for them to remain under the awnings of the ship which was carrying them towards their destination, which it was said the captains would not allow to be removed; and the religious authorities declared that in such case of necessity their sin would be pardoned to them on the sacrifice of a sheep on their landing at Jeddah. (On hearing this, our captain offered to have the awnings removed, but this they begged him not to do, as they preferred paying for the sheep to dying from sunstroke. A sheep costs about 7s. 6d. of our money.) Every little transgression they commit during the pilgrimage must be atoned for by the slaughter of a sheep, and these transgressions are numerous, for if a fly settles on them they must not kill it, and if anybody strikes them they must not swear at him. Thousands upon thousands of sheep are sacrificed in this way every year, and the shepherds of Arabia drive a good business, and pray every year that the sins of their brethren may be increased.

Arrived at Jeddah there ensues a scene which, whilst it defies description, is well worth coming all the way to witness. As soon as the ship comes into the middle harbour, forty or fifty dhows or lateen-sailed native boats come swooping around and attempt to secure passengers. But the quarantine flag is still flying at the masthead, and Turkish men-of-war's boats course round the ship and drive off the dhows with much cursing and swearing. Presently the doctor's boat with its snow-white sail and Turkish flag above it comes rushing along, and as soon as he arrives alongside and sees the papers *pratique* is given. Now is the time for the dhows and the coolies on them. They swarm into the ship like so many demons, never take the trouble to ask anybody any questions, but seize everything they can lay their hands on, and shove it into their boats. The women are tossed overboard like so many bundles, no matter whose wives they may be. Coolies are not soft-hearted ; they pay no more heed to the prayers, protestations, tears, and curses of the pilgrims than if the latter were dogs. Woe to the pilgrim who tries to resist ! One man tried to secure his luggage by sitting on it. Three sets of boatmen attacked him. After much struggling, one set walked off with the coverings of his packages, another with the contents, and the third with the pilgrim himself. They mostly secure all their possessions at the custom-house after paying a good deal of 'backsheesh.'

Jeddah is only forty miles or so from Mecca, and the pilgrims start usually in the evening. Yet the journey is not devoid of danger, for the Bedouins on the way do not hesitate to relieve their co-religionists of their property. An armed guard always accompanies the pilgrim. Nearly everybody in Jeddah goes off. The bazaars, a few days before full of life, now are silent and deserted like the streets of a city of the dead. Many white-clothed and helmeted Europeans are seen about, for during the time of the Hadj there are as many as twenty or twenty-five large steamers in the harbour. After going to Mecca for the Great Hadj, such pilgrims as have not come early and visited that city first of all, go off to Medina, a distance of ten days' journey. Many of them die from the heat and the privations to which they are exposed. And woe to the ships that have to carry them back ! They are then indeed a sorry and mangy-looking crew, and often bring amongst them many cases of infectious disease which play great havoc in the ship after a few days.

THE POTATO'S PLACE IN HISTORY.

A NEAR member of my family, too much addicted, I regret to say, to levity of thought and freedom of expression, on perceiving the title I have given to this Philosophical Discourse, has unkindly suggested to me, as I sit, pen in hand, awaiting inspiration, that the potato's only proper place in history is surely in a vegetable dish. I mention this shallow and ungenerous domestic criticism at the very outset merely in order to demonstrate the obvious unfitness of the feminine mind for the Higher Culture, and the crosses to which authors are frequently subject in quarters where sympathy might be most confidently expected. The remark itself I treat as beneath rejoinder. I answer not a lady according to her foolishness.

For it must be obvious at once to Thinking Minds, like yours and mine, most proverbially candid and intelligent reader, that the potato has really played a very large part in the world's history—a part far larger than Marlborough's or Napoleon's; that it has more than once saved France and famished Ireland; that it has changed the whole face of smiling plains, and spread cultivation up the arid slopes of barren mountains. For a single plant—and in all probability a single individual weed—to have done so much is at least something. And now that we stand within measurable distance of a great social revolution—the extinction of the potato—now that our horticultural and medical pastors and masters are even beginning to discuss among themselves what we shall do for an antiscorbutic when we have to go without potatoes altogether—the time is surely come when those lowly tubers should no longer languish in unsung obscurity, *carent quia vate sacro*. The Last of the Mohicans, the Last of the Barons, and the Last Minstrel have all been celebrated in fitting lays. I will fling myself into the breach like Marcus Curtius; I will constitute myself, *pro tem.*, the *vates sacer* of the moribund race; I will pose as the Laureate of the Last of the Potatoes.

For the potato is really going to pot—or, if the expression be deemed too personal to the subject, to Bath, Putney, Jericho, Halifax, or any other familiar refuge of the destitute in such case made and provided. The soul of Kew, indeed, is disturbed about

the potato. Consultants are debating on its probable lease of life. Constitutional disease and the Colorado beetle have preyed too long upon its delicate organism. It is yielding at last to old age and infirmities, and botanical authorities refuse to insure its enfeebled frame at average rates for the next fifty years. Why it has thus fallen a prey to premature senility will appear further on ; but, in order to understand to the very bottom the Decline and Fall of the Potato's Empire, it will be necessary to glance a little more closely than usual at the causes which led to the rise and progress of the potato generally. It will then become evident —paradoxical as it sounds at first hearing—that almost all the potatoes in the world may be regarded with high probability as parts of a single potato plant ; and that it is the gradual growing old of this one worn-out herb which now threatens the world with the approaching potato famine.

Who is the potato, and where does he come from ?

All over the earth, in tropical, subtropical, and temperate climates, there grow various members of an uncanny and highly suspected family known to botanists as the solanaceæ or nightshades. A more unpromising group than these doubtful herbs in which to look for a human foodstuff could hardly be imagined. There are families, like the grasses, which supply mankind with endless useful plants—wheat, rye, Indian corn, barley, millet, oats, rice, and sugar-cane. There are others, like the pea tribe, almost every one of which has some economic value, either directly for human food, as in the case of peas, beans, and lentils, or indirectly for fodder, as in the case of clover, vetch, lucerne, and sainfoin. But the nightshades are just one of those ill-omened families which bear on their very faces the obvious marks of an evil disposition, and which are regarded with a certain shrinking instinctive disfavour even by those who have no first-hand knowledge of their objectionable character. One of them is the well-known belladonna or deadly nightshade, which haunts old ruins or monastic buildings, and contains a powerful acrid narcotic poison, famous for its stupefying and relaxing action on the retina. Its flowers are a lurid brown in colour, and look as deadly to the sight as they really are. Its berry is black, shining, and uncanny ; and the whole plant has a distinctly murderous air, which its popular name exactly expresses. The potato, in fact, is a solitary well-behaved and respectable member of a peculiarly abandoned and dissolute family—a family in which

poisoning and witchcraft and all evil practices run riot as commonly as crime and murder in a Mediæval Italian princely house.

For almost all the other nightshades bear out in their way the evil repute of belladonna. One of them is mandrake—the mysterious mandrake—that plant with forked roots, gathered by moonlight under the gallows shade for purposes of enchantment and of unholy rites, and incidentally known to scientific medicine as an almost equally dangerous and virulent narcotic. A second is that curious half-mythical plant, the Apple of Sodom or Dead Sea Fruit, whose leaves are thickly covered with bristling needles, and whose tawny berries are filled within with the ashes that overwhelmed the Cities of the Plain, though modern botany unpoetically describes it as a common shrub of Corsica, Sicily, and the eastern Mediterranean. Then there is the bittersweet or climbing nightshade of our English hedgerows, whose wicked lilac flowers of uncertain hue ought to be enough to warn anybody of its evil intent, but whose treacherous red berries, filled with a poisonous narcotic principle, are answerable every year for the deaths of a good many village children. And more terrible still is the common black nightshade of our waste places, known in French as *herbe des magiciens*, whose juice is powerful enough, when externally applied, to get rid of warts, and, when internally administered, to get rid of one's enemies. Even the potato itself is not wholly above suspicion in this particular ; for, though the tubers are wholesome enough (when decently cooked), the berries or potato-apples are said sometimes to have proved highly undesirable food for those bold spirits who ventured to experiment upon them, and, in the concise language of a medical authority, ‘to have determined headache, nausea, and advanced symptoms of atropine poisoning.’

Unpromising as the nightshades usually show themselves, however, with their lurid flowers and their round, shining fruits, there are a few plants even in this wicked tribe which ingenious man has pressed somehow into his exacting service. The capsicum, to be sure, with its near relation, the delicious little West Indian bird-peppers, one can hardly count as a genuine exception ; for, though a small quantity of red pepper is pleasant enough as a flavouring to soup, a diet of cayenne would doubtless prove unduly pungent and exciting ; and a single drop of the essential oil of capsicum is sufficient, as our medical friend would gracefully phrase it, ‘to determine death in great torment.’ But the

tomato, that gentle and harmless vegetable, so unexceptionable in its character that early writers knew it as the love-apple, is a true nightshade—a solanum of the solanums; and though both flower and fruit have, in outer bearing, all the distinctive poisonous type of the entire tribe, I have never yet heard a whisper of reproach against the unassailible character of the mild tomato. Even Serjeant Buzfuz himself, if I recollect aright, when denouncing the insidious way in which Mr. Pickwick employed ‘tomata sauce’ to undermine the sacredest feelings of Mrs. Bardell’s nature, had not a word to say against the intrinsic wholesomeness of that excellent preparation in its proper place. I believe, also, nobody has ever complained of the luscious egg-fruit; while the winter-cherry or Cape gooseberry—that curious fruit wrapped up in a blanket that doesn’t fit it—is only dangerous to the excesses of youth, which its insipid character prevents it from inspiring to any dangerous degree in adult maturity.

Nevertheless, in spite of some few redeeming members (like Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius among the middle Cæsars, or Giovanni delle Bande Nere among the later Medici), the nightshades as a group must be distinctly regarded as a doubtful, unwholesome, and ill-conditioned family. That from such a stock should have sprung the harmless, necessary potato—the pride of the New World and the joy of the Old, the support and stay of the sister island, and the confident boast of the *maître d'hôtel* (in connection with broiled steaks and chops at the Criterion)—is one of those profound mysteries of heredity which, in the words of a once famous metaphysical inquirer, no fellow can understand.

Viewed merely as an esculent tuber, however, this is apparently how the potato first came to be. In some unknown region of the New World, probably somewhere about the Highlands of Peru—for the origin of the potato, like that of Mr. Jeames de la Pluche and other important personages, is ‘wrop in mystery’—there grew, at that precise period of history known to chronologers as ‘once upon a time,’ a Solanaceous Plant peculiarly persecuted in the struggle for life by the persistent attentions of too many hungry and herbivorous admirers. In such a case the common resource of any ordinary unscrupulous member of the solanum family would doubtless have been to adopt the usual solanaceous tactics of poisoning these its obtrusive friends and actual enemies. Any other solanum would have filled its stem and leaves with narcotic juices, and made itself exceedingly bitter to the taste, so

that the beasts and birds, disgusted at the first bite, would have desisted from the vain attempt to devour it. Not so the father of all potatoes. That honest and straightforward plant declined to have recourse to such mean strategy. Hard pressed by herbivores in the struggle for existence, it struck out a new line for itself and for Ireland. It invented the tuber.

And what is the tuber, which natural selection, thus acting upon the necessities of the primæval potato, succeeded in producing for a hungry world? Essentially and fundamentally it is not, as most people imagine, a root, but an underground branch, bearing buds and undeveloped leaves on its surface, which we know as eyes, and capable of doing all the work of a branch in producing foliage, flowers, and berries. All that is peculiar to the tuber, viewed as a branch, sums itself up in two cardinal points. First, it happens to develop underground (an accident which, as we all know in the familiar cases of layers and suckers, may occur with any ordinary branch any day); and secondly, it is large, swollen, and soft, because it contains large reserves of material, laid up by the plant in this safe retreat to aid the future growth of its stems and leaves in a second season.

A tuber, in fact, must be regarded merely as one of the many plans adopted by plants in order to secure for themselves continuity of existence. In woody shrubs and trees the material laid up by the individual to provide for next year's leaves and flowers is stored in the inner bark, which does not die; and this accounts for the way in which such trees as almonds, mezereon, and *pyrus japonica* are enabled to blossom in early spring before the foliage itself begins to come out. But soft and succulent plants, which die down to the ground with every winter, cannot act in this way. They adopt, perforce, a different plan: they bury their treasure deep in the ground to keep it safe from the teeth of greedy herbivores. It is true, rabbits and other burrowing animals get at it even so; but, at any rate, the chances of destruction are greatly lessened, and so the plant gains a point in the struggle for existence which often enables it to hold its own in the battle of species against all competitors.

This was the case with our primitive potato. A juicy and fleshy weed in its native form, much liable, as we all know, to the attacks of insects, and affording a juicy pabulum for the browsing ruminant, the aboriginal potato provided against a rainy day by storing up starch in its underground branches or tubers, to set up

the life of the plant afresh in the succeeding season. When winter came, the part above ground withered and died—a single frost will turn a whole fieldful black to this day with surprising rapidity—but the underground branches, safe alike from cold and from animal foes, kept up their vitality in a dormant state beneath the hard clay through the long winter. In short, while man exploits the potato for his own use and benefit alone, the primitive ancestor intended to exploit it for its own growth and the continuance of the species.

Of course the potato has seeds too, about which I shall have more to say further on; but, in addition to the seeds, which make new plants, the potato vine desired, so to speak, a personal immortality, not a mere vicarious and secondhand vitality, in the life of its offspring. It would have nothing to say to any foolish Comtist verbal juggle. It wanted to go on living as long as it possibly could itself, not merely to produce seedlings which would live and flourish after it had itself assumed the inorganic condition. This not unnatural desire of the old Adam the potato tubers enabled it at once to attain; and to the formation of tubers, accordingly, it devoted from the first by far the greater part of its redundant vital energy.

In order to understand precisely what the potato is driving at, we must consider the case of a potato-shoot sprouting in the dark, which clearly exhibits to the meanest intelligence (no offence meant, and let none be taken!) the actual use of these reserves of material. As a rule, light is necessary to vegetation; a seed can't grow to any size in the dark, or a bough put forth green leaves; sunshine is the active dynamical agent of plant growth and plant development. But a hyacinth bulb or a potato will send forth shoots in a dark room, because these rich reserves consist of organised material already laid by, and capable of assuming the leaf-and-branch form without the immediate aid of sunshine. The hyacinth will even bud and blossom under such conditions, while the potato will push out long pale stems, which head straight for any ray of light that may happen to enter its dark cellar prison.

And this consideration leads us to the true point of view of the potato, as not a seed, but a part of the same individual plant as the mother that bears it. Gardeners call the potatoes they use for planting seed potatoes; but the cut fragments are no more than a sucker or cutting is truly a seed; they are un-

developed branches of the old potato vine. The real seed, of course, is contained in the fruit or potato apple; and genuine seedlings are from time to time procured therefrom to start fresh varieties; indeed it is in this way alone that new and improved sorts can be produced. And the difference is not, as we shall soon see, a purely technical one. On the contrary, its importance is being practically demonstrated at the present day by the gradual decay and constitutional feebleness of all potato-kind all the world over.

For a seedling is like a child—a genuine new individual, the product of a flower fertilised by pollen from another blossom of its own kind; and it begins life on a fresh basis for itself, full of young and sturdy vitality. But a cutting (which is what a ‘planted potato’ practically amounts to) is not a fresh young life at all; it is only a bit of the old diseased and worn-out organism stuck into the ground and started anew in slightly different conditions. Its true animal analogy would be found if we could cut off a gouty leg and grow an apparently distinct man from it, with all the constitutional faults and failings of the enfeebled and aged first possessor. And the trouble is (as our American friends quaintly phrase it) that for years and years we have gone on growing potatoes in this unnatural and undesirable way, with hardly ever a fresh cross—a true marriage with its consequent infusion of new elements—till at last the whole stock has become so hopelessly old and used-up that even its seedlings are now as feeble as the offspring of two worn-out old parents might naturally expect to be in any species.

Look for a moment at a few parallel cases elsewhere, which will help us to understand the seeming paradox of all potatoes being only part of one original and only genuine potato. The famous Canadian river-weed which came over to England some forty or fifty years ago, and has dammed up all our canals and waterways ever since with its rapidly growing masses, is an admirable illustrative example of the sort of thing I want to emphasise. For the Canadian river-weed (I mercifully spare you the infliction of its botanical name) is one of the few plants (like the date and hemp) which bear the male and female flowers on totally different individuals. Well, the plant that came across to England many years ago—they say, to a pond in the Cambridge botanical gardens—happened to be a female specimen. No male came with it, so it could never set seed in the ordinary fashion. But, thriving

wonderfully in its new home, it sent out suckers or underground shoots which soon ran wild among the rivers of the fen-country ; and thence, getting torn up by the bottoms of canal-boats, broken pieces were accidentally conveyed into all the other rivers and streams of England, where they took root at once and flourished everywhere like a green bay tree. Now, all these new or derivative plants are of course female, because in fact they are part and parcel of the one original old plant that came first like a new William the Conqueror to England ; and no male flower of the river-weed has ever yet been observed by botanists in any part of this isle of Britain. Thousands and thousands of specimens have been carefully examined, but not a male blossom has ever been discovered here. Consequently, the weed has never set seed, and never produced any true seedlings ; the whole mass of waving green foliage that now covers the beds of so many streams from Caithness to Cornwall belongs in the last resort to a single very big and wandering plant, just as truly as all the branches of an oak or a spreading ivy-bush belong to the same single individual.

Similarly with what we call varieties or kinds in roses or strawberries. A gardener produces from seed a particular rose-bush, with certain attractive individual features, which belong as distinctively to that particular bush as her beauty belongs to a particular woman. If he were to grow seedlings from it again, they might not 'come true,' as gardeners put it ; or, in other words, they might exhibit individual traits of their own, different from the traits so much admired in their respected mother. So, to avoid that contingency, the gardener makes no seedlings from his bush ; he takes advantage of this curious power of multiplying the selfsame individual by mere division without any cross of fresh blood, and 'takes cuttings.' The flowers of these of course remain always the same, exactly as they would have done had the branches been left upon the tree that bore them. With strawberries, in like manner, when the gardener has once got a good stock from seed, he cultivates the runners, which are only, after all, long naked branches, that root and leaf at definite distances. In every case you can only produce a truly new individual by genuine wedlock—by crossing and seeding ; and, though the life of the old much-subdivided plant may continue for many, many years in special circumstances, there comes nevertheless a time at last when all its force is utterly *épuisé*, and it must needs die like the old, old oak or the cedar that numbers a hundred centuries,

So now see the plight to which in the case of our chief vegetable we have unconsciously reduced ourselves. We have allowed our one potato-plant to grow so old that even when we take seedlings from two of its flowers—themselves mere sister-blossoms of the same decayed and decrepit stock—the very seedlings in turn start in life with decayed constitutions, due to so much breeding in and in, and lack the vigour and vitality of true young blood. The philosophic poet of the Bab Ballads warns ‘elderly men of the bachelor crew’ that if they insist upon committing matrimony late in life, ‘their babes will be elderly, elderly too.’ That is just what has happened to the poor potato. For lack of frequent healthy crossing, the entire vitality of the race has been slowly dissipated ; the entire stock has grown old together, and we stand now face to face with the awful possibility of a potatoless universe.

But why can’t we go back to the fountain-head once more, and start afresh with brand-new potatoes from their native forest ? Ay, there’s the rub, as Hamlet justly puts it. We can’t discover the fountain-head any longer. Nobody knows where the potato comes from : the native forest itself is dead. The aboriginal wild potato seems as extinct in our day the wide world over as the dodo or the deinotherium.

This is often the way with important food-plants. Nobody can trace with certainty the ancestor of wheat or of Indian corn, the primitive father of the plantain or of the banana. The fact is, whenever a plant lays by these rich stores of material for its own use, either as seed or root or bulb or tuber, man, greedy man, is sure to divert it to his own purposes, as ruthlessly as he robs the bees of their honey and the cows of the milk they have prepared for their calves in their own udders. Every important human foodstuff is essentially at bottom a seed or a tuber ; eggs in the animal world answering to the one, and fatted beasts answering roughly to the other. Wheat, barley, Indian corn, peas, beans, dates, and cocoanuts are instances in the first direction ; potatoes, turnips, yam, beetroot are instances in the second.

From the very first moment, then, that the ancestral potato began to lay up starches and foodstuffs for itself in its own underground tissues, we may be perfectly sure that rodents, monkeys, and other animal enemies did their level best to circumvent its innocent design by digging them up and incontinently eating them. Presently, man, as the Red Indian, arrived upon the scene, and subjected the incipient and starchy potato to some rude culti-

vation. In one way, he was less destructive, no doubt, than the rodents and monkeys who had gone before him, because, while he rooted up and grubbed out more indefatigably than they, he kept a little back for 'seed' for the future. He cut up his potato into many small pieces with an 'eye' in each, the eye being in fact an undeveloped leaf-bud, whence branches would issue in another season. Thus he ensured in some way the continuance of the plant; but, alas! he only cared for his own squaws and papooses in the immediate future, and took no thought for the convenience of the intrusive white man in this then remote nineteenth century. And considering how little the white man thought of *his* convenience some ages later, perhaps his remissness in this respect is not to be wondered at.

At any rate, what the Red Indian seems to have done was just this: as in almost every other case of primitive agriculture, he brought the wild plant into cultivation, and improved largely its special yield; but in so doing he destroyed its native type altogether. Whether he grubbed up all the wild ones and ate them on the spot, or whether he merely encroached upon their open feeding grounds and so crowded them out, as farms and fences are crowding out the buffalo in the Far West, does not appear; but what is certain is that the wild potato itself does not now appear either. We have lost all count of the primitive stock, so that we can't go back to it to cross it with its own degenerate descendants, or to develop anew from its barbaric tubers the succulent Regent or the Ash-leaved Kidney.

When Raleigh brought the potato to Europe, it fared even worse in its new home at the hands of man than it had done in its old one. For the attention of civilised gardeners was mostly directed to producing new and better varieties—seedlings that ran to tuber exceedingly—at the expense of the general constitutional vigour. More than that; when once a good seedling was produced, everybody tried to get 'seed'—really tubers for planting—from that individual plant and no other, thus neglecting to keep up the older varieties. The consequence is that all the potato plants on earth are now parts of two or three individual potatoes, and may very likely be ultimately derived from a single good gardener's variety of the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

When once a plant has reached that advanced stage of dotage, its fate is sealed, surely and irrevocably. *Actum est de potato.* You may indeed prolong its life for a while through progressively

feebler and ever feebler representatives ; but, sooner or later, die it must, of pure *épuisement*, like the last of the Tasmanians on Norfolk Island. It is a used-up race, and nothing on earth will save it. It is worse off even than the Romans of the decadence or the moribund Byzantines, who could still intermarry with the fresh young stock of Goth or Slavonian. For it has no chance of crossing left to reinvigorate its blood. It becomes a prey to ten thousand diseases, from the fungus that caused the Irish famine to the devouring flood of the Colorado beetle.

The history of this last-named aggressive host in itself beautifully though painfully illustrates one final chapter in the biography of any decadent species. The potato-bug, as it is more simply than euphoniously called in its native country, plays to the dying potato the part of the barbarian invader to the Roman empire. (Did I not promise to discourse to you of the Decline and Fall, and do you not now see how strictly appropriate, by biological analogy, was that seemingly strained and extreme metaphor ?) For many centuries the Colorado beetle, as yet unknown to fame, had fattened and thriven on the leaves of a Rocky Mountain solanum, which was not the potato, but a distant cousin of somewhat similar taste in the selfsame family. It commonly happens that each species of plant in the wild state is thus preyed upon by a particular insect ; and entomologists know well that the best way to catch certain rare butterflies or moths is by watching for the caterpillars on their special food-plant, so as to breed them out in due time from the chrysalis. The solanum of the Rocky Mountains was thus the proper pabulum for the larva of the Colorado beetle, ere yet its dreaded name was known to history, or its misdeeds had become in two worlds the subject of repressive legislative enactments.

In time, however, as civilisation took its way westward, the potato spread in its wake to the base of the Rockies. The white man came and brought his tuber with him. Then the enterprising beetle saw his chance in life. Being a tolerable botanist, he perceived at a glance that the new plant introduced into his preserves by the American immigrant was indeed a solanum (though I don't for a moment suppose he called it to himself by that or any other name), and that it would probably prove, as the advertisements say, 'an excellent substitute' for that other of its kind, his accustomed food-plant. He tried it forthwith, and it succeeded admirably, 'The Potato for the Potato Beetle !' was

thenceforth his cry. In a very few years the number of Colorado beetles on the face of the earth had increased a thousandfold, and the intrusive host of loathsome, crawling larvæ—they are the ugliest and slimiest creatures ever seen outside a museum—had set Malthus at defiance, and spread over the length and breadth of America. To them it must have seemed as though the American people had planted whole square miles of a peculiarly delicious and succulent solanum for no other purpose than to provide a pasture for innumerable hordes of Colorado beetles.

Now the moral of all this, as the Duchess would have said to Alice in Wonderland, is immediately apparent to the reflective intelligence. Why did the Colorado beetle, who had never killed off his own solanum in endless centuries, succeed in overrunning such vast areas of good potato country in a few short seasons? Clearly because the potato itself was already too enfeebled by old age and disease to withstand the attacks of its insidious enemy. A vigorous young stock would have repelled the invaders, as Rome repelled the Gaul in the days of the Republic: a decadent race could no more resist it than the provincials of the last age of the Empire could resist the onslaught of Alaric or Attila. The reason why the potato fell so fast before the mountain-bred foe was the same as the reason why the Roman fell before the northern barbarian from his snow-clad fastnesses. The stock was worn out: the race was exhausted: whatever enemy chooses to attack it now, be it Goth or Hun, beetle or mildew, gains an easy and all too inglorious victory over the unhappy tuber. Nothing remains but the ghost of the once mighty plant, the *Romani nominis umbra* of defunct potatohood.

And is the potato really doomed? And must the tuber die? Then thirty thousand Kerry boys will know the reason why. Has a cruel and oppressive Saxon government, intent merely on the woes of Kent and Leicestershire, done nothing to prevent this national disgrace, and to guarantee the foodstuff of the finest peasantry in Europe? Well, there is still hope, though a very faint one. Attempts are being made by skilled botanists to cross the potato with various allied South American solanums, so as to bring back something of the primitive vigour to the exhausted stock, and to preserve its life to many future generations. If these experiments prove successful, the plant we shall obtain will be, not quite a potato, but a sturdy mulatto of sound and vigorous constitution. It is hoped that the new potato (not, of course, in

the Covent Garden sense) will prove superior to the attacks of *Peronospora infestans*—the mildew of the famine—and will laugh to scorn the puny attempts of that now dreaded visitor, the Colorado beetle, whose advent in Europe by Cunard steamer, on a continental tour, has been duly expected any time these last ten years.

Finally, let me pour forth one word of comfort into the distressed ear of British housewifery. I fear my prognostication of evil to come may have sunk too deep into the tender heart of many an anxious wife and mother. She may have trembled too trustingly for dear baby's dinner. To calm these excessive fears for the future of cookery, I should like to explain that when I talk of the proximate extinction of the potato I use the words only in a Pickwickian sense, and by the usual measures of geological chronology. The probable date which I would fix upon for the fulfilment of my prophecy is approximately that of the Greek Kalends. The potato is undoubtedly in very feeble health; but its friends and its medical advisers hope that with care and attention its life may be spared for many years to come, if not even perhaps prolonged indefinitely. Threatened men live long. The potato may live longer than any of us reckon upon. It is true its constitution is seriously impaired, and its liability to disease grows every day more marked. But no effort is being spared by science to recruit its shattered health; and now that the true nature of its complaint—old age—is fully understood, measures are being taken before it dies to supply its place, if the worst should come, by an appropriate successor of the same family. This successor will doubtless share half its blood, and, if the attempts at hybridisation turn out as well as we have reason to expect, will be stronger and healthier than its decrepit ancestor. In any case, we are fairly safe in our own time. Our beefsteak will not be divorced from its faithful helpmeet. And after us the deluge. Succeeding ages will learn to do without potatoes altogether, or will patronise the yam-trade with the flourishing republics of Central Africa.

WHITE CITY.

It was generally conceded, in the Wolf Creek community, that Daniel Dunstan had no more sense than the law allowed him—and his liberty.

It was no wonder then, that when a certain Mr. Lockyear, a 'claim locator,' struck Wolf Creek, in search of recruits for the Far West, one of the 'suckers'¹ that he caught was Dan.

This old Lockyear had apparently formed an ideal Paradise, which conception he applied to the barren waste which it was to his interest to 'settle up.'

After the manner of 'locators' in general, he could lie—by the rod. But if interrupted by a question, his answer invariably was, 'You betcher!'—'You betcher!'—or 'You betcher?' as the case might require. According to him, the only spot, West, fit to settle in was that particular Paradise of which he alone knew all the 'Government corners.' '*Anything* could be raised there;' and the water was 'of the bulliest kind!'

When a statement is correct in every detail, it is the custom of some men to supplement it with, 'Straight goods! according to Hoyle.' Before Mr. Lockyear had been in Wolf Creek a week, statements of a contrary character were said to be 'according to Lockyear—you betcher!'

'The soil,' exclaimed the locator to a little crowd of loafers in the hotel, 'is a fine rich sandy loam—I should remark it was about the richest in the United States! Here's a sample of it, boys, I brought back with me. Judge for yourselves.'

He produced a small coffee-box, and opened it for inspection. 'Eh? what! *Wood-ashes*? D—— them fellows' monkey tricks! I'll get even with 'em! *Wood-ashes* it is' (he had thrust his hand into the box), 'you betcher!'

It was a memorable day for Wolf Creek when Lockyear and Dan Dunstan left it; for on that day one of the lard-tanks at the pork-house exploded, killing three men, thirteen hogs, and a Chinaman.

Still more remarkable was Dan's return. To the astonishment of every one he came back, three years later, with a 'bushel of

¹ The sucker is a fish which feeds on the bottom, and will take almost any bait—hence the expression.

money,' built the Dunstan House, at a cost of one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, and married the daughter of the president of the bank.

Some said, 'A fool for luck, anyhow ;' but the better-natured exclaimed, 'Bully for Dan !'

A few of the latter were invited to dine one evening with Mr. and Mrs. Dunstan, when the former gratified his guests by telling them how he had made his money :—

'None of you fellows ever "held down a claim" ?' (None of them had.) 'Well, then,' said Mr. Dunstan, 'take advice that has cost me a few hundred dollars, and DON'T !'

'But it seems to have panned out all right in your case,' said one.

'So it has. But I'll tell you : they say, "A fool for luck——"'

'And a poor man for dogs,' interrupted another.

'That's right. Well, I decided to take up land "outside the limits;" so when we got to Sage station, I hired a wagon and team, and we drove about thirty miles due south, where old Lockyear said there was a fine valley—"you betcher."

'I somehow didn't think the old cuss knew much about the country; but still, after driving pretty nearly all day, we did eventually find a nice-looking valley—and he appeared to recognise it at once. After figuring a little, he said we were in "range" 61, and about "town" (township) 13; so we hunted around for a Government corner; having at last found one, Lockyear tied his handkerchief round the front wheel of the wagon and drove, while I counted the revolutions.

'We were pretty tired; the country was sandy, and the sun pretty hot, so before I had counted out two "sections" I dropped off to sleep, fell out of the wagon; that started the horses, and away they went with Lockyear. They must have run pretty straight, for it was the township corner that upset the wagon.'

Mr. Dunstan paused to minister to his guests. Mrs. D—— sensibly withdrew; which action being silently taken as a signal for the cigar of peace, the host continued :—

'I located in that valley, on a nice little stream which old Lockyear assured me would never "dry up—you betcher." (I remember the way he shook his head as he said it.) It had been an exceptional winter for snow, or that little stream never would have been on the surface—it *never* has since; it "runs under."

'Well, I filed on the north-west quarter of 10 as a "homestead,"

and the north-east quarter as a "tree claim." (It was out of the question to grow trees—they wouldn't live; I never knew any one to prove up on a "tree-claim." The way they do is to hold on to it for the two years and then sell the "right"—if it's worth anything—to some one to "pre-empt.")

"It was four miles from a ranche, and there I boarded with the "granger" (the "outfit" were away on the "round-up") until I got my house up and well dug.

"He was a nice man ("Honest John" they called him), and he promised to help me out. When I got down with the well so I couldn't throw the dirt out any more overhead, he came down and drew it up for me.

"It was on one of these occasions (I was down the well) when a waterspout burst (the two storms came together with a bang!) about three miles north of us, and came roaring down the valley. We had just time to get into the shantee, when over it went and us in it. The door being on the south side, it had us nicely cooped. You see, I had the shantee up first, but couldn't live in it till we struck water; this was another simple trick! I should have dug the well first; but then, you see, I had reckoned on the stream—and that went back on me.

"It was while we were cooped up there, and the rain driving through the cracks in the floor (which now stood to the north, of course), that John said:

""Dan, didn't you say this was the north-west quarter of 10?" (He was sitting there on the side of the overturned stove, despite the way the lightning flashed, just as unconcerned as if things were right side up.)

""Yes," I said.

""Seems to me mighty strange," said John. "Why, our place is on 36, in the next 'town' west."

"This set me to thinking; and sure enough, when I got a land-agent down the next week to survey it out, he just said that old Lockyear "was a fool, and had worked me for a sucker." The land that I had "filed on" was over two miles away. So I had to file on the same piece over again as a "pre-emption," and lose my "homestead right" for nothing, and didn't get the money back either.

"When we set the shantee up again we put her down solid, you bet!

"I got John to "break" two acres for me (as required to

"prove up"), and I put in a patch of beans. Then the drought set in. The beans came up about four inches, and there they stood! Where in thunder was I to get sticks from? That was a thing I hadn't thought of; but it didn't appear as if they would ever need any, anyhow.

"I was out one day after antelope (I "rustled" all my meat, except a ham now and then as a luxury), when I happened to come across a large patch of sunflowers, where an old sheep corral had stood, and just happened to be struck with the idea, Why shouldn't these sunflowers make the best kind of bean-sticks? So I came the next few days and dug up young ones, about a foot high, and set down one to every hill of beans.

"There they stood. For a month neither of 'em grew an inch, but the beans just twisted round and took hold. I could see that my scheme was going to work like a charm!

"At the end of the month we had a good storm, and I looked out with satisfaction on the crops. How they did shoot up in that one day!

"But the next day was a scorcher. I thought, towards afternoon, that those beans looked sort o' sickly—and sickly they were! When I came to investigate the matter, the sunflowers had grown at least two feet, and had taken every last bean up with 'em—by the roots—and their name was Dennis!"

Mr. Dunstan paused, and then went on:—

"I had to go thirty miles after my mail. Sometimes I used to go up and back in a day, and sometimes up one day and back the next. Sage was a pretty poor place to stay at, and what few people there were there used to say with a smile when they saw me:

"‘Hello, Dan! How's crops down your way?’ (You see that bean racket had got out on me.) But they don't act that way now.

"Although when I was at home at the shantee no one would ever come in sight except John, yet, somehow, when I was away they could find the place right enough.

"One time when I returned from Sage all that was left of my chickens (I had two hens and a rooster) was a plateful of bones and the old rooster (he was a tough old cuss). The shantee was full of feathers, and the two heads and insides laid on the table—but my guests had gone.

"Single-blessedness didn't suit that old rooster (I believe he

had a deal more sense than I had), for day by day he wilted ; until one morning, when he could crow no more, I found him on his back, dead, with his head turned up and his feet stretched out, one behind the other, pointing to the east in an attitude of derision. Perhaps you don't believe it, but I missed that old rooster as if he had been something human.

'Then a skunk took up his abode under the floor of the shantee.

'And the grasshoppers came, and, take my word for it, gentlemen, they would have eaten all the siding off the house (there was a fine crop of sunflowers, but they didn't appear æsthetic), but luckily a strong wind got up and took them further west (to perish I hope !) before they had their job finished.

'Another time I rode up to Sage, and back the next day. As I got near home I saw several ponies standing round outside the shantee ; when I got there and looked in, there sat four "cow-punchers," as unconcerned as you please, round the table, playing "seven-up." The fire was out ; a pile of dirty cups, plates, and dishes stood on the stove ; they were all chewing tobacco, and the place was in a fine mess, I can tell you. One of them saw me standing there looking astonished, so he said :

"Come in. Don't stand knocking."

"Boys," I said, looking round at the mess there was, "why don't you come out here with the spade and go to shovelling dirt in——"

"Another interrupted me with :

"Is your name Dan ?"

'When I said that it was, they got up. One started the fire, another went to the well to fill the kettle, the third got a broom and went to sweeping up, the other threw a cloth over his arm and commenced to wash dishes.

'When the fire burnt up, one went to the corner of the house where an antelope hung, and began to cut steaks.

"I believe I'd a little sooner have ham," said I.

'They looked at one another, and then one said, "I reckon if he wants ham" (he spoke as though addressing the others, not me) "he'll have to turn cannibal ;" and in corroboration another produced the ham bone.

'However, they stayed the night, and we put in a right sociable evening, playing poker. When they left next morning I was sorry to see them go, for all my spare cash went with 'em—

and in those times thirty odd dollars *was* thirty odd hard iron dollars.

‘But beans, skunks, grasshoppers, and “cow-punchers” were *nothing*. There came, a few days later, a poor man from Missouri.

‘He had come West to make a home for his family, and “rare ‘em up with the country;” the East was “overstocked.” He took up the north half of the section cornering on mine, and lived with me while he dug his well and got his house up (of course I helped him).

‘So the time passed, and I thought I was glad to have a neighbour.

‘He said that his family were on the road with the furniture and stock, and “he reckoned, since all was fixed” (he had put up a good deal bigger house than mine, but “reckoned he could *furnish it*”), “he’d go East and meet ‘em.”

‘As I had advertised to prove up, I persuaded him to stay a week longer (you see, it would take the family a matter of seven weeks or more to drive out from Missouri), and be one of my witnesses.

‘Well, I “proved up” (after considerable trouble, but then, you see, I was “green,” and didn’t “catch on” that the judge only made these obstacles to get ten or twenty dollars or so for himself). “Honest John” was my other witness.

‘I looked up north from the shanty one day, about noon, and here came a cloud of dust; in it I could see a “prairie schooner” and some cattle trailing behind.

‘When they came up quite close I was able to “take in” the whole outfit. Sitting on the front seat, and looking out from under the wagon-cover, was the old man; next him was his wife—a youngster in each arm; and strung along for two or three hundred yards behind were cattle, horses, and children of all sorts and sizes, till you couldn’t see out! To this day I don’t know how many there was in that family, for I never took the trouble to “round ‘em up.”

‘It was about a week after they had got fairly settled, when the old man came over to me one morning with the two biggest boys, one of them a fine-grown fellow, about sixteen.

‘“Fine lad that,” I said, as I shook hands with the boy; “I suppose he’s the eldest?”

‘“No,” replied the lad smartly. “Let me see” (he reckoned on his fingers), “there’s five gals and two boys older’n me—but I can lick ‘em.”

" You see," said the father proudly, " Bill here is *left-handed*. That's it, why he is such a right smart chance of a lad. Yer see, we raised 'em up (such raisin' as they had) on *hash*; they had it set out to 'em in a big bowl. All the rest of 'em is *right-handed*. Waal, they would all go for it, till round and round went the hash in the bowl, so as none of 'em could catch much besides soup. Then Bill come in with his left-handed sweeps, yer see, and caught all the *chunks*. But," he went on, just as I was going to speak, " I come over this morning ter see you on bisness. Seems ter me it's about time this township had a school-house."

" The devil, you say!" I exclaimed (for you see we were the only two settlers, and half the expense would come on me). "But," I added, " I've got no children to send to school, so I don't see how it affects me."

" More fool you," he replied—and I don't know now whether he meant for having no children or for not seeing how his having enough for both (or a dozen, for the matter of that) affected me.

" You see," he went on in an authoritative tone, " the law provides that when there is a certain number of children in a township there must be a soitable school-house. Now you and me is the only voters—in fact, we're the school-board and the taxpayers. Sort o' rocky on you," he broke off, " but laws is laws!"

" Perhaps the old man saw a queer kind of expression on my face, for he added quickly :

" Maybe you don't think that I've got as many children as the law provides—"

" I don't doubt it one bit!" I broke in (you see, I was sort o' hot), " but there's a pile of difference between the *law* providing for 'em and Dan Dunstan doing it."

" But I saw clearly that I was at fault for having no family of my own; and I swore that that should be amended "just to get even with him."

" So we went peaceably to work together, and put up the school-house on the "school-section."

" We had nearly finished tacking down the floor one day—the old man was wedging up with a chisel while I tacked down—when he looked up and said :

" Dan, you ain't exactly fixed to board a 'school-marm'" (he startled me, for, you see, I hadn't thought anything about a school-

teacher), "and I ain't got room ; how would it strike yer if my eldest gal—she's got her certificate—taught the kids ?"

"I said, very agreeably, that "it would strike me where the wool was short" (for, you see, I thought that the girl would be glad to teach her own brothers and sisters, and any one else would want pay. I thought he just asked for my consent, so that the motion would be carried unanimously).

"Waal," he went on, "I've talked it over, and, bein' as things is as they are, she's willin' to teach *our* school" (hanged if he didn't lay stress on "our") "for twenty-eight dollars a month ; we couldn't get any one else less'n thirty."

"This fairly knocked the breath out of me, I can tell you, gentlemen. Was I going to pay fourteen dollars a month for the benefit of having his kids whooping and howling around like Indians ? Not much I wasn't ! But I didn't let on.

"When I got home I shook the coal-oil can. There was about a gallon or so left.

"Early in the morning (before daybreak) I got up, caught my horse and saddled him, rolled up the bedding and tied it on behind the saddle in a pack, and slung my rifle under the stirrup-leather. Then, when all was fixed, I sprinkled that coal-oil round on the floor, and took a match——"

In the laughter of his guests at this point Mr. Dunstan lost the thread of his story. Presently he continued :

"I hadn't got more than ten miles or so up the valley, when I was met by a buggy-load of men evidently headed for our valley. The driver knew me (he came from Sage). I saw that it was a survey-party by their instruments.

"Hello, Dan !" exclaimed the driver ; "these gentlemen were just coming down to your place—want to know whether you can board 'em ? "

"Can't board *anything*," I answered.

"They looked at me as though they would have liked to ask, "What kind of a man *are* you ?" before I added :

"I'm burnt out."

"That's tough," said one or two of them.

"Then they told me that they were going down to "cross-section" the old railway survey which ran through our valley, and that the contractors were going to commence work at once, to extend the M. & G. through to the coalfields. They wanted to have used my shantee for a time while at work in our valley, for

the survey ran across one corner of my land (it was a "claim" no longer, for I had my "patent").

"This was something new to me, and I began to wish that I hadn't been quite so hasty.

"We might fix you up in the school-house," I suggested; "that is, until I can run up another shanty." I began to think that it might pay me after all to stay, and submit to that fourteen dollars a month.

"What in the world are you doing with a school away down in here?" asked the "chief."

"Well, to cut a long story short, it was from that day my luck commenced.

Before winter set in the "cars" were running up the valley. They made a station on the next section to mine. The valley (and a good deal that wasn't valley) was thickly settled and well irrigated within a year. Our town (White City, a well-known place now) had a boom. It was made the capital of the county, as you know; and we've now got the finest court-house in the State!

"I had to lay out my land in town-lots. I sold over fifty thousand dollars' worth in six months, and still she booms.

"So now you know how I made my pile, and became "*Mr. Dunstan*" in place of plain "Dan."

THE MUSIC-HALL.

THERE is no more misleading test of a people's elevation, intellectual or moral, than their amusements, for it is commonly with a people as with individuals—the greater height they touch in their development, the lower mostly are the depths of their recoil. That this is true of individuals may be seen from many great statesmen who openly delight in all kinds of trash, and often recommend it ; from great lawyers, doctors, artists, whose chief pleasure very frequently lies in the most hopeless of Mudie's produce, the most inane of comic operas, the most impossible of plays ; while, on the other hand, Prigley, with his superior pincenez and silly blond beard, incompetent *au bout des ongles*, never descends below biography and travels, attends all the Richter concerts, and would expire if he were taken to any other theatres than the Lyceum or the St. James's. And, for a people, it is well known that the more motionless or retrograde they are, the more are their relaxations characterised by extreme gravity, irreproachable sense, absurd importance. Savages are too limited in their gamut of appreciation to get any fun out of Collini and Robini, the great Irish knockabouts. The Chinese would be fatigued to extinction by the Seymours, those remarkable American variety artistes, in their novel comic sketch, 'Out on the Tiles ;' the Celestial would call, rather, for some scene from history, profane or religious. The Turk, the Persian, the Hindoo, all these races without a history or a literature really worthy the name, would in all probability stab, poison, or bowstring the best of our great character artistes, our funny comics, our favourite sons and daughters of Apollo and Terpsichore. Unhappy, then, the nation that has no appreciation of hopeless vulgarity ! woe to the country that has no love for senseless laughter ! The day when England echoes no longer with an utterly foolish and inexplicably popular comic chant will be the day when the knell of her decadence will most surely have struck. I am confident Rome would never have declined if only the imperial city had rung with the melody of a *proavi mei clepsydra*, the martial strains of a 'Grandfather's Clock,' or the yell of Caius and Balbus, arm in arm in the Suburra—*pugnare nolumus !*

And it is a fact that a man has to be very clever before he can afford to read a feeble, twittery tale of love, an hysterical novel, false and sickly, from cover to cover; whereas any human material may be educated to the highest pitch of incompetence on the hundred best books.

Now the old actor is so familiar a figure that, if he has not yet bred contempt, at any rate I believe we are all tired of him. We know his rusty jargon, his senile vanity, his spirituous tears, and we know his haunts, now the public-house or frowsy club, and now the boudoir of the refined and lovely daughter who has married well. But the ancient comique, the worn and toothless lion, where does he drag his peaked bones to? what damp cavern or shades reverberate with his hoarse old roar? Not that I have any desire to follow and converse with him, of old triumphs and old wrongs. The old actor may or may not be an engaging companion, but from Champagne Charley in his decrepitude I confess I should not look for much more sparkle than from the worst waters of a German spa. And where is he to be found? They say no one has ever seen a dead donkey; I don't mean to be disrespectful, but has any one ever met a respectable retired Great Inimitable?

The ladies, gems of refined vocalism, are easier to trace. Charming duettists and comédiennes, one knows what often becomes of them. They marry money-lenders, public-house auctioneers and brokers, whom they have to keep. Charming duettists, their unmelodious complaint is not unfrequently heard by the sitting magistrate, to whom they chant the brutalities of drink and late hours. 'Tis the Bulbul put away in the back-kitchen to sing neglected by the sink; the county beauty who marries the county scamp, and comes down to having her face slapped in seaside lodgings. Nemesis has innumerable unsuspected channels of making herself felt, and La Désirée, Queen of Song, or Loo Perky, the charming serio-comic, is perhaps only having to face old impertinences revenged when she faces the paltry little ruffian who has long ceased to care for her and now lives on her earnings.

Let us enter one of these music-halls, one of these palaces of white and gold and plush and electric light, sprung from the old free-and-easy behind the public-house bar, with gas-blackened ceiling, dun bare walls with the hand of Allsopp and the triangle of Bass, and on the floor a polynesia of spittoons in a sea of saw-

dust. Mark how the landlord with his white sleeves and apron has developed into the proud chairman of the blazing shirtstud and the ivory hammer ; how the lawyer's clerk who could sing a good song has swelled into the artiste who is the darling of London society, neither more nor less ; how, in a word, the evening haunt of the local tradesman has burst into this gorgeous house of call of men of every rank and gathered from all corners of the globe. There is a cloud of smoke, cigar, cigarette, and pipe, a White Sea of upturned faces ; the band plays a teasing jiggly waltz, while from a supreme height hangs La Divine Brasilienne head downwards, waving her white arms as though inviting us up to share the perils and delights of her loftiness. We know to what these fine talents and daring nerves will often sink ; let us endeavour briefly to trace their rise.

In this manner, mostly. M. Georges, the equilibrist of the Cirque Loisset, and Pinkney, the English clown, are leaning over the bridge at Marney-sur-Seine, watching the broad river rushing swallow-tailed through the arches, and vaguely catching the dull beat of the Bohemian's drum as he urges his rusty bear to climb the acacia-trees in the clump outside the rampart. The two friends do not speak, they simply enjoy themselves, while the smoke of M. Georges' *vevey fin* curls into the calm autumnal air and the cloud of Pinkney's birdseye, smuggled to him by a faithful friend in the small of the faithful friend's back, circles round him, god-like and serene and cheerful. Behind rises the town of Marney, dominated by the sharp angle of the cathedral roof, the flag of the Mairie, the innumerable dormer windows of the hotel ; below, down by the waterside, there is something that fixes Pinkney's attention, for he leans his head on his arms and stares and laughs and swears. It is a ragged little girl, with a long mouth and short skirts, small black eyes, and wiry black hair, who has dropped from the wharf edge on board of an' empty lime-barge. There, in the clumsy tarred rigging, she is going through a fearless little performance, the embryo of those daring flights of hers right across the music-hall roof, high above the smoke and the faces, and the flickering haze of the footlight gas ; and there, on the wharf edge, stands a small frightened friend, partly frightened at the peril of the performance and partly at the peril of the trespass ; prototype of the bow-legged ex-trapezist, with cropped head and long trained moustache, who now stands below the net anxiously watching La Divine, deftly swinging and flying in her

red dress and red flowers, and wicked little black kiss-me-quick curls. Pinkney, the clown, laughs and swears as Jeanne screams, and climbs, and swings, and before very long on this soft autumnal afternoon, the mellow sun sinking in the woods, both these gentlemen are down on the wharf edge, and while the little friend in terror runs away, Jeanne is captured and explains. Jeanne's mother is *charbonnière*, and lives Rue Marie-Talbot; Jeanne has brothers and sisters, but she is the eldest; father is a sailor and away in China; and as for her, she is afraid of nothing, and can even shin up trees. Only last month in the woods, chasing a squirrel, driving him to his last retreat, a solitary lofty fir, she swarmed after him and brought him down safe, scratching and biting in her apron; and at home, whither Pinkney and M. Georges accompany her, there, among her many pets and captures of jackdaws and martins from the sand cliff, there is the squirrel and there the *charbonnière*, bustling and worn and begrimed, weighing out charcoal.

The delicate negotiations between M. Georges and the *charbonnière* that followed would take too long to narrate; the result of them was an apprenticeship to the Cirque Loisset and the beginning of a long and weary training. The Cirque Loisset passes away from Marney, pads with its elephants and camels and Nubians over Normandy; indeed, pretty well over the whole of France; and at eighteen Jeanne finds herself for the first time in Paris and has her first bad accident. It was at practice that she broke her ankle, and the healing proving obstinate, the faithful Pinkney comes to the rescue with his insular prejudice and fetches an English doctor who had cured him, a young fellow just finishing his course at the hospital. *Drôle d'histoire!* with the young English doctor, Jeanne, hitherto untouched, falls desperately in love; she, high on the trapeze, out of bowshot of the god, is winged at last and falls broken and panting into the net. She is long getting well, and begins to alarm her friends and proprietors, when presently she learns that he is leaving Paris, and behold! she is well at once. Pinkney is puzzled and M. Georges is suspicious. Jeanne lies watching them both with her quick black eyes as she rests on the sofa; she has her plan, and is more than usually affectionate with Pinkney and talkative with Georges; and the end of it being that she is to go to the sea for a week with Mme. Gailhard, wardrobe mistress, to recruit, she chooses Boulogne, of all recruiting dépôts, and on a certain afternoon in spring might

have been seen there on the walls of the old town, in rapid conversation with the young Englishman. What they talked about as they wandered in and out of the crooked streets of the odorous old town and out on the walls I cannot tell, but I know that Pinkney, uneasy and anxious, travelled from Paris to see her, and came upon them, directed by Mme. Gailhard. All Jeanne's bad blood and bad training came surging up, and there was a violent scene, though more on her side than Pinkney's, who remained perfectly cool and good-humoured. The young doctor admired him, disliked Jeanne, despised himself; the veil of his illusion which vanity and idleness had helped to draw was rent by this outburst, and he was free. He and Pinkney had a long talk, and the upshot of it was that he went on to Calais by the evening train instead of crossing, as he had intended, from Boulogne.

'You're a man,' said Pinkney in the *salle d'attente*, 'and not a monkey, and I'm proud to know you. And I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll write you how we get on, and—run for it, mister! here's Jeanne!' Jeanne saw the movement, and pride came to her rescue, and next day Pinkney and she and Mme. Gailhard went back to Paris in silence. It was from this time that Jeanne took a new aerial flight, from this time that she began the first of those outrageously daring tricks that have made her famous in the circus world. Our wounded feelings often find their balm in all sorts of outbreaks that to ordinary folk will look like madness, and Jeanne found hers in perilous inventions and combinations that made Pinkney's clown toupee to quiver with alarm and M. Georges to grind his teeth. Who would suspect it? How little we know of each other, our dead and dying hopes, the living illusions we clutch, on and by which, indeed, alone we often live! What clerk or cheap tarnished *viveur* below in the smoke would ever guess that this rather evil-looking woman carries about in her tricky heart the corpse of an affection, very womanly and true; that she never swings high above them on the trapeze without a glance along the surface of the gaping crowd, of which it is possible he may form one; that, wild as she has been and is, she still feels how easily she might have been better, how easily indeed good? Why, it is twelve years since that day on the Boulogne walls, and since then I don't suppose she has ever heard the young doctor's name, and yet I would engage to shake that iron nerve of hers by just calling it out to her from below. *Tzing!* she falls with a cry into the net and is up smiling and bowing, amidst the

billowy roar of the dingy White Sea. La Divine Brasilienne has done her turn for the night, and is off in a four-wheeled cab across the water to do another.

A trumpet sounds, as though the Consuls were entering the circus, and a gentleman enters to us with the mouth of one of those Lowther Arcade heads into whose baggy receptacle in youth we most of us have shied balls. He opens it to its most fearful extent, and his vicious little eyes disappear, and he howls his way through a song, of which, unfortunately, you can hear every word. He is in evening dress with a crush hat, and after each verse he dances heavily round the stage. He is a fellow-creature with a living to get ; that is all that can be said of him. I don't know what he was originally intended for—I imagine a commercial traveller in ironmongery. Now, at any rate, he is a comic singer. If it were not so on the programme I would not have believed it. And they call him great, too ! but, then, so was the Beast in the Apocalypse.

It is more bearable, and altogether pleasanter, when, amid the scratch of matches, that never-varying music-hall accompaniment, there beams upon us, innocent in white and gold, infantile even from the length of their dresses, the gracious vision of the Sisters Limejuice. I had the advantage of seeing them at the wing before their entrance, and could not help remarking the rather sullen expression of their features, from which I should have gathered that they were deadly enemies and neither of them well ; but, once before the house, they were all smiles and health and sisterly affection. For a scene, they have a classic background of a study with busts of Shakespeare and Dryden, under whose mighty auspices they break out into a rippling duet of love and politics. Love, as known to the music-hall artiste, is a passion *sui generis*. It is a mixture of the valentine, the cosaque cracker, the penny novelette, and the 'Family Herald.' It is, to be candid, sweet-hearting rather than lovemaking, and may or may not have disastrous consequences. The young couple walk the lane in the moonlight, the trees whisper, the brook babbles, the stars twinkle ; in a word, Nature does for them all that she has ever done for the most devoted of lovers ; but, capricious creature ! once they are married, the voices are dumb and all that remains to dominate the old harmony is the peevish cry of a child. In fact, anything more terrific or deterrent than the music-hall view of matrimony it is impossible to conceive. Discomfort, drink, dirt, debt, all

these demons reign in the music-hall *ménage*, and all are apparently recognised from the front as true Lares and Penates. And yet almost the majority of the audience are, as I judge them, respectable married folk and appear tolerably contented and happy. Perhaps, then, they applaud because it is all *not* true, because they know their own homes are free from these little drawbacks; perhaps, if it all were true, they would sit silent at the description of their own misery, rather than enraptured as they are.

It is strange, but the Sisters Limejuice have precisely the same series of gestures for politics as for love. When they are threatening Russia, a favourite music-hall practice, they lay their hands on their hearts, sway their bodies, kiss their fingers, exactly as they did when they were describing the transports of the moonlit lane. And again when, after a rapid change of dress, they reappear somewhat less buxom in black and red, their gestures are just as familiar and affectionate an accompaniment to a series of topical verses, in which they deal with amazing and pungent frankness with current events, mostly collected from the *chronique scandaleuse*.

I don't know whose business it is to see after the songs one hears in these places, but the fact is they are many of them of the type known as doubtful; meaning by that, songs of the character of which there neither is, nor can be, any doubt whatever. As for the Sisters Limejuice, they are fortunate in their audience, whom they understand and who are well disposed towards them. So far as I can see, you can always make pretty sure of a music-hall audience, either by attacking the vices of the aristocracy or abusing Russia. For these audiences are always, like schoolboys, intensely Conservative, and, most of them revelling in the consciousness that they are never likely to be called on to fight in defence of the country, yell with defiant rage at the notion of the Bear laying a paw on our Indian Empire, and rhyme 'more' and 'claw' with '54' (meaning by that the Crimea) with the true belligerency of the non-combatant. Pass the fair sisters, charming duettists, whom I have the honour to escort to their cab, their heads muffled in black lace, on the way to do the same elsewhere, and enter Pholus, Continental comedian. Pholus is a comedian of an astonishing scientific turn, with actually an electric light fitted on to his nose, which, when his flageolet gives a deep note, or he desires to express any violent passion of horror, astonishment, or anger, glows a sudden fiery red. The effect is truly

marvellous, and affords an agreeable insight into the recent development of science. I feel somehow, as I watch its railway-signal glow, as I used at the Polytechnic, that I am being educated and amused at the same time. He has a little dog with him who sings and even does a high shake. 'Noo,' says Pholus to his dog, sitting calmly on a chair surveying the hall, 'noo, tremble!' (the Pholus for 'shake'), and the creature opens his shaggy little mouth and trembles *à ravir*; and further, when Pholus holds up his finger, he holds the note tenderly and plaintively; and when it is dropped, he sinks to a G, so low as to stir the ashes of Lablache. No wonder that his master's nose glows with sudden pride, the directing force of which dwells in a tiny hat on the top of his bald head, which by the conducting wires is plainly seen to be a battery. In the front row there are some young merchantmen ashore, very friendly and talkative with the band, very consumptive of bottled beer, who take Pholus and his dog under their especial protection and constantly pass them reassuring remarks; and presently, when Pholus, whose speciality appears to be the drawing of music out of all sorts of unlikely receptacles, enters with a strange instrument something like a stovepipe and something like an eccentric chimney, on which he proceeds to blow 'La ci darem,' 'Hi!' shouts one of them, 'he's got the galley funnel!'

It is by this time the height of the evening and the hall is full; young blood is in the lounge and old blood is soberly smoking below. Self-satisfied youth with its hat over its eyes threads the crowd aimlessly in and out; middle-aged bucks lean over the bar with dull eyes and do nothing, not even drink; young gentlemen sitting bolt upright next their fathers, follow the programme carefully and clap their hands, which no one else does; respectable ladies, old and young, bury their blushes in beer or in rapid conversation with each other, and up in the boxes fine dresses are rustling and youth is settling its shirt-front and trying to look at its ease. Among them all there is a curious type of *habitué* often seen in music-halls and not easily placed, did not one know the infirmity from which he suffers, and which is, in fact, the cause of his presence. It is the deaf gentleman, who desires amusement and cannot get it at the theatre, who is too old to dance, and not good enough company to dine out every night; the deaf gentleman, in irreproachable evening dress, who solemnly smokes the whole entertainment through, complacently listening to the chorus and the loudest of the comiques. His lips move, but no

sound emerges, while his companion, picked up at the club, sings to himself, looking with stolid bashfulness down his nose and poking his little finger into the end of his cigar. Behind him a boy with very bright eyes shouts for a while with his hat on the back of his rumpled hair and then stops with a foolish laugh.

The music-hall stage will often be found a resting-place for those who are going up and those who are coming down in the theatrical world. Ladies and gentlemen who are now the lights of comic opera, drawing their twenty, thirty, forty pounds a week, not so very long ago were dancing and singing in the smoke here, and doing their two or three turns a night elsewhere; while others, who even in my memory were princes and princesses of opera-bouffe, now smile at us painfully across the haze and try hard to win back some of our old favour. Here's a lady, for example, I remember in the best days of Offenbach as never any one below a prince, or at any rate a shepherd that climbed by hook or by crook to royal honours, and now, poor dear, thin and worn, in a pink dress that is worn and thin, and a voice to suit, she pipes one of those abject ditties with a waltz refrain that in this atmosphere are supposed to be descriptive of love. She seems very tired of it all, and, depend upon it, would not be here if she could help it. I suppose, when money was coming in fast, there was some scamp making it his business to see that it went out faster, or perhaps, just at an unlucky time, she was taken ill and recovered only to find her part occupied by somebody whom she has never since been able to displace.

And now there ambles on a shy young man with a concertina and a flaxen wig, very short trousers, and blue body coat, who, never raising his eyes above the footlights, floods into voluble discourse of the American-German combination, familiar to us from Hans Breitmann. He follows close on a Japanese who, with a sunny background of English lane and village church, tosses knife and ball and fan in the manner introduced to Europe by the Japanese of the Paris Exhibition of '67, and since then grown tiresome; and he in his turn treads close on the heels of a ventriloquist whose title of 'Lieutenant' seems chosen with deliberation, since he very truly takes the place of many. It was only yesterday that in an ancient French song-book I lighted on an account, so far as I know, of the first ventriloquist, which, being hitherto, I believe, absolutely unrecorded, I here venture briefly to transcribe; and I do it with the more confidence since, notwithstanding

standing the expectations raised by the shy young man with the concertina of something novel in his humour, he doesn't on the whole appear worth listening to.

The ancient song begins:—

Dans les prisons de Londres (*bis*)
 Lui y a-t un prisonnier : gai, faluron, falurette !
 Gai, faluron, dondé.
 Que personn' ne va voir (*bis*)
 Que la fill' du geôlier : gai, faluron, falurette !
 Gai, faluron, dondé.
 Elle lui porte à boire (*bis*),
 A boire et à manger : gai, faluron, falurette !
 Gai, faluron, dondé.

The prisoner in the tower was a Breton sailor, captured by one of our vessels during the Hundred Years' War, and, as a man of wealth and importance, brought to the capital to await either ransom or exchange. This Breton sailor, apart from his position at Plouannec of merchant and privateer, held another quite different, if indeed to be an undeveloped ventriloquist may be considered a position. At any rate, Dyring was at home in Plouannec much esteemed, and by many feared for his strange gift, partly of mimicry and partly of ventriloquism, a practice to which in his gay moments on shore he was much addicted, entirely regardless of time and place. In the tower, alone and in the twilight, he had scarcely anything to do but recall his home and its holidays by imitating to himself the drone of the *biniou* and the clatter of feet in the *ronde*, mingling it with laughter and singing, and the dull chant of the priests leaving the cathedral ; and then it would be a summer morning at his farm on the Côtes du Nord, and you would hear the sharpening of the scythe, and the wheezy scream of the seagull circling over the buckwheat, and the bleat of the goats, and the creak of the cart ; or again, sitting round the winter fire, there would be a winter tale-telling, beginning with the solemn invocation ‘In nomine Patris et Filii,’ in Tonyk’s high voice, interrupted by the grandmother’s cough and the ohs and ahs of the girls listening. It was, in short, a kind of ‘Dyring at home,’ an at home in the Middle Ages, ‘dans les prisons de Londres,’ without a chance of escape, a performance that mightily frightened and interested Agnes, the gaoler’s daughter, who hung her linen to dry on the bushes just under his window, and could hear him talking and laughing, and scraping a violin with his lips. Pity is akin

to Love, and Curiosity does the introduction, and Agnes, as the verses set out, began to carry Dyring his food and drink, then to just glance at him stretched lank and melancholy in a corner, and finally to open a little conversation, for the prisoner knew some English, and was glad to air it in his damp cell. He lay in the dusk and she stood in the twilight, fair-haired and pitiful, and one day ‘il lui demande qu'est-c' que l'on dit de moi?’ to which she replied, Dyring, I imagine, supplying the refrain:—

Le bruit court dans la ville (*bis*)
Que demain vous mourrez : gai, faluron, falurette !
Gai, faluron, donté.

That evening the unfortunate Dyring gave so complete a representation of a Breton wake and funeral—the shrill acolytes, the snuffling priest, the loud sham grief of the heir, the crying women, then the singing of the procession, the hard breathing of the bearers of the coffin, the click of the gravedigger's spade striking on stones—that when the soft-hearted Agnes in tears stole in to see him, and he cried to her, ‘Puisqu'il faut que je meure, ah ! déliez-moi les pieds,’ the girl, ‘encore jeunette,’ did as she was prayed, with the result that the ‘garçon fort alerte’ in one bound was on the river wall, and at the second plunge had crossed the sea, the first carrying him straight to the bottom. There, safe on his own shore, he set himself to sing—

Que Dieu béniss' les filles (*bis*),
Surtout cell' du geôlier : gai, faluron, falurette
Gai, faluron, donté.
Si je retourne à Londres (*bis*),
Oui, je l'épouserai ! gai, faluron, falurette
Oui, je l'épouserai ! gai, faluron, donté.

That is the record of the first ventriloquist of whom history or song, identical in authority, makes any mention. *Sic eum servavit Apollo!*

The end of the music-hall evening comes, and for the end is reserved the cream. This is a young lady, hoarse with singing elsewhere, but with astounding spirits and vivacity, who describes a water-party where they all got tipsy. She's a ladylike-looking girl, dressed as any other young lady to be observed taking a first-class ticket at any of the South Kensington stations, but that doesn't prevent her bounding healthily about the stage, indulging to the full her somewhat broad humour, which we all, even I,

cheer to the evening echo. She is, I am informed, queen of the music-hall stage ; queen, then, of Bohemia, or Misrule.

To the superficial philosopher the music-hall will seem the haunt of rather vicious elves and somewhat damaged fairies. Well, the humour here is, I confess, the humour of the gutter, of the kind familiar to any one whose ears are open as he walks the streets ; the repartee is that of the 'bus-driver in collision with a rival, and the observations generally on life and manners those of the lowest. Indeed, beyond the costermonger, the policeman, the private in the Plungers, the gent with cash to cut a dash, the performers don't appear to have any notion that fun can lie. And further, there is no reflection there of love, or honour, or reverence, or obedience, nor, to speak the brutal truth, of any very cheerful or honest merriment. But to the really thoughtful these very deficiencies are a happy and a worthy sign. That such places are thronged, that such companies pay their twenty and five-and-twenty per cent., is the best possible evidence of the solidity of our national character ; and we keep the tight hold we do on the family life, the reverence we pay to order, to obedience and purity, precisely because by studying the reverse we find there is nothing in them to imitate, satisfy, or admire. For let it be remembered that these audiences, mainly composed of honest tradesmen, of men and women whose lives are full of order, duty, labour, self-denial, are not laughing *with* the artistes, but at them.

STRANGE FOOD.

THAT what is one man's food is another man's poison is a trite saying, but it conveys volumes. It signifies, if it has any meaning at all, that nearly all the foods used in different parts of the world are harmless—nay, that they are positively nutritious and wholesome, for otherwise how could they be eaten with absolute impunity? The dishes which we Englishmen devour and fancy are alone man's proper food are often an abomination to people of different race and creed, while the food eaten with gusto in distant lands would frequently fill us only with disgust. Depend upon it, eating and drinking are mere matters of custom, and no rule can be framed absolutely right and none entirely wrong. Man's natural food, what is it after all but that food which chance, or necessity, or fashion places within his reach? One man eats fish, another flesh, a third fowl, and a fourth fruit, and all thrive, not in the same degree; still all thrive, exemplifying the vastness and inexhaustible variety of the food resources which man calls his own. There is hardly a creature that has life which man has not, in one climate or another, or in one age or another, used as food. There are few fruits on which some portion of the human race has not feasted, while many of the hardest, most indigestible, and least palatable of the products of the vegetable world, such as grass, bark, roots, acorns, and I know not what besides, have served him in the hour of need, or have ministered to a more or less depraved appetite.

As far as is known no species of bird is absolutely uneatable, at any rate none is poisonous. Once, when a lad, I stewed a jackdaw, and, though the flesh was tough, the gravy was most savoury and tempting. Few four-footed animals are uneatable, and it is only among fishes and fruits that we find poisons. My brother once brought me two squirrels which he had shot, and having read that gipsies relished them, we watched our opportunity, and, in the absence of the family, set to work over the dining-room fire and stewed them; and I must confess that, whether it was owing to the share we had had in preparing them, or to the omnivorous nature of boys' appetites, we had no cause to complain that the dish lacked tenderness, flavour, or wholesomeness; but I do not suggest

that these charming little rodents should be slaughtered by way of general experiment. Jugged cat I have not eaten, but a clergyman once told me that he and some clerical friends, living in rooms together, were much tormented by the frequent visits of a venerable clerical brother, who would drop in when least wanted, and who was not satisfied unless a rich meal was forthwith prepared for his capacious appetite. One day these young scapegraces obtained a large cat, which the cook most skilfully prepared for the delectation of the old clergyman, who had been duly invited, thus forestalling one of his usual visits. Some excuse was made, and the old fellow, much to his joy, found himself the sole partaker of a large and delicious dish of hare, and he ate as only the rectorial appetite could eat. Never had he tasted anything so choice ; the flavour, the tenderness, the gravy, and the jelly were most tempting. The sequel to the story is not, however, what I could wish. At last, when his appetite had been satisfied, one of his hosts began uttering cries like those of the cat, and after a little time the guest awoke to the startling consciousness that he had demolished a large cat. He was almost at once taken ill, and for some days was in extreme danger. Whether that was due to the character of the meal or to the enormous quantity he had contrived to dispose of was never ascertained. He stoutly maintained the former, and his hosts the latter. However that may be, the experience of the siege of Paris is conclusive that, in moderation, hardly any animal is unwholesome, for not only were horses, dogs, and cats eaten when they could be got, but hippopotami, elephants, and mules. As for rats, the French soldiers in Algeria contrived to earn a welcome addition to their scanty pay, and at the same time they replenished their not too liberal larder, by acting as amateur rat-catchers and rat-eaters both in one. Mr. J. G. Wood tells us that the rat is delicious ; he often enjoyed rat pie, and feasted upon the rich gelatinous food which it contains when well made and properly cooked. He reminds us that the rat is a particularly clean animal, and that its flesh is as tender and wholesome as that of the pig, and we know that the latter is so overpoweringly attractive that at one time in primitive ages —so at least Charles Lamb assures us—people did not scruple to burn down a house so that the resident pig, who then I suppose lived with his master, might be roasted to perfection.

As for hedgehogs, and it is said even weasels, stoats, and other odiferous carnivora, gipsies—that picturesque but not

particularly cleanly and most unsavoury people—wrap them up in a thick coating of well-puddled clay ; then, putting the case in the fire, a slow but thorough process of stewing goes on, and at the right time the mass is withdrawn from the fire, and the clay, or by that time the brick envelope, is removed, the skin, hair, or feathers, as the case may be, adhering to it, and inside there is found a delicious morsel fit for the palate of a king.

In the charming life of Charles Darwin there occurs a very interesting passage. ‘Another old member of the Club tells me that the name—the Gourmet Club—arose because the members were given to making experiments on “birds and beasts which were before unknown to the human palate.” He says that hawk and bittern were tried, and that their zeal broke down over an old brown owl, which “was indescribable.” At any rate the meetings seem to have been successful, and to have ended with a “game at mild vingt-et-un.”’

Darwin relates in one of his letters an amusing anecdote of his experiences. ‘I must tell you what happened to me on the banks of the Cam in my early entomological days. Under a piece of bark I found two *Carabi* (I forgot which), and caught one in each hand, when, lo and behold ! I saw a sacred *Panagæus crux major* ! I could not bear to give up either of my *Carabi*, and to lose *Panagæus* was out of the question, so that in despair I gently seized one of the *Carabi* between my teeth, when, to my unspeakable disgust and pain, the little inconsiderate beast squirted his acid down my throat, and I lost both *Carabi* and *Panagæus*.’

Some fish, principally inhabitants of tropical seas, will, when eaten, destroy life, and that too at all times. Some other species are only poisonous at certain seasons of the year, and, still more extraordinary, individuals of a certain species are dangerous while others may be eaten with impunity. It is quite impossible to give any explanation of these peculiarities. The health of the fish at the time of its capture, the food of which it has been partaking, or even some idiosyncrasy on the part of the eater may be a factor in the deplorable result. When it comes to vegetable products, however, we can lay our finger on the chemical principle that endangers life or occasions death. Amongst those terrible secrets of nature which we shall probably never clear up, are the purposes which were served in giving strychnine, nicotine, morphine, and atropine properties so deadly that a few grains will for ever still the beatings of the most vigorous human heart. Why should an

infinitesimal dose of *nux vomica* convulse the frame of the strongest man, and bring his existence to an almost startlingly sudden close, but with agony so indescribable, spasms so appalling to witness—how much worse to endure!—that the man who has once seen a case of the kind and then ventures to put down such awful poisons for the destruction of cats, rats, and birds must find an almost diabolical pleasure in causing suffering? Then again, why is prussic acid so speedily fatal to him who takes a few drops of it, while its aroma is so pleasant? Shall we ever know?

The strangest food a human being could eat is his brother man. Fortunately cannibalism, although once distressingly common, is now confined to the most degraded tribes of the South Sea Islands and of Central Africa. St. Jerome accused the Attcotti, a Scotch clan, of preferring the shepherd to his flock, and possibly, considering the cold-blooded ferocity for which those cruel North British tribes were long infamous, and the frequent scarcity of animal food in their bleak and inclement country, the charge may be well founded. Some traces of this revolting custom lingered among the Scotch until comparatively recently; at least, if I do them injustice, they must not blame me but one of their countrymen, Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, for having traduced them, for he is responsible for the charge.

The Duke of Argyll, in the exhaustive and most interesting treatise he has lately published, ‘Scotland as it was and is,’ gives a most curious passage that, besides illustrating the ferocity of the Irish knights of seven hundred years ago, shows that modified cannibalism still lingered among them. ‘It is not a Protestant, but a Catholic historian,’ he says, ‘who gives us the most terrible account of the conduct of Dermot, King of Leinster. We are told that when the men of Ossory had been borne to the ground by a charge of the English cavalry, the fallen were immediately despatched by the natives under the banner of Dermot. A trophy of two hundred heads was erected at the feet of that savage, who testified his joy by clapping his hands, leaping in the air, and pouring out thanksgivings to the Almighty. As he turned over the heap he discovered the head of a former enemy. His hatred was rekindled at the sight, and, seizing it by the ears in a paroxysm of fury, he tore off the nose with his teeth.’

To come to foods less horrible than man, whose trials and disappointments are sufficiently severe to exempt his body from often serving as aliment to his fellow-man. The lion is eaten by some

African races, but its flesh is held in small esteem. The Zulus find carrion so much to their liking that, according to the late Bishop Colenso, they apply to food peopled by large colonies of larvæ the expressive word ‘uborni,’ signifying in their uncouth jargon ‘great happiness.’ David Livingstone, that keen and accurate observer, reminds us that the aboriginal Australians and Hottentots prefer the intestines of animals. ‘It is curious,’ he says, ‘that this is the part which animals always begin with, and it is the first choice of our men.’ On this point I may remind the civilised reader that the woodcock, and the red mullet or sea woodcock, are both eaten and relished without undergoing all the cleansing processes, which most animals used for food among us generally experience, to fit them for the table, so that our aversion to the entrails of animals is not absolute, but only one of degree.

The hippopotamus is a favourite dish with some Africans when they can get this unwieldy and formidable river monster, and when young its flesh is good and palatable, but with advancing years it becomes coarse and unpleasant. The Abyssinians, the amiable people to whom, according to the Italian Prime Minister, his countrymen propose to teach wisdom and humanity, find the rhinoceros to their taste; so they do the elephant, which is also eaten in Sumatra. Dr. Livingstone describes the elephant’s foot as delicious, and his praises will be echoed by many travellers in lands where that sagacious monster still lingers in rapidly decreasing numbers. ‘We had the foot,’ wrote the great doctor, ‘cooked for breakfast next morning, and found it delicious. It is a whitish mass, slightly gelatinous and sweet like marrow. A long march, to prevent biliousness, is a wise precaution after a meal of elephant’s foot. Elephant’s tongue and trunk are also good, and after long simmering much resemble the hump of a buffalo and the tongue of an ox, but all the other meat is tough, and from its peculiar flavour only to be eaten by a hungry man.’

Among Greenlanders and Eskimo the seal is the chief article of food; it was, indeed, formerly eaten in England, although coarse and oily. The porpoise was once an English dish, and the liver of this beautiful animal is, when fried, still relished by sailors. Another huge sea animal, the walrus, was found to be very palatable by Arctic explorers, and it is largely consumed by the Eskimo. The Japanese, New Zealanders, and Western Australians find the whale good eating, and the Eskimo, those

enthusiastic consumers of anything and everything oily and nasty, highly approve, as is well known, of blubber and devour it *ad nauseam*. The narwhal, or sea unicorn, is one of the Greenlander's dainties, while the Siberians and the Eskimo live in part on the flesh of the reindeer.

But the foregoing do not exhaust the strange foods of the world. Dogs, cats, horses, lizards, bears, hedgehogs, frogs, otters, skunk, rats, mice, wolves, camels, and indeed almost every creature that runs or flies, are, in some part or another of the globe, in nearly as much favour as venison, pheasant, and sucking pig among us. Surely, however, culinary eccentricity can no further go than in the preparation of that famous German dish, sauerkraut. This delicious food is a vegetable compound, and is thus prepared: The leaves of cabbages, the stalk and midrib being removed as a little too tough for the not very fastidious stomach of the people of the Fatherland, are cut up and placed in a proper receptacle in layers, with abundance of salt between them; the strange mess is next subjected to pressure, and is allowed to stand until it is quite sour from fermentation; then, being fit for food, and as wholesome as it could ever become, it is stewed in its own liquor, and eaten with many deep German ejaculations expressive of the perfect satisfaction of the gourmand. In passing let me point out that, with the exception of the final stewing, the preparation of sauerkraut is closely like that of ensilage, the form in which on every New England farm, and on a very few Old England ones, green food is economically prepared and preserved for the winter consumption of cattle, and as in this way it agrees particularly well with the latter, why should it not also with man?

Coming to our own land, where we don't eat sauerkraut and blubber, birds' nests and puppies, elephant's foot and bison's hump, we shall nevertheless find some strange foods in common use. Not to speak of the intestines of the red mullet and the woodcock, and the red currant jelly added to venison, game and mutton, not to dwell upon game in a state not unlike that in which the Zulus prefer carrion, the hedgehog, as I have before mentioned, is eaten by the gipsies, who thus imitate the people of Barbary and some of the Spaniards; it is even said that the frog—the *Rana esculenta*—is often eaten in the north of England, while, as we all know, the poor turtle fares no better when the City aldermen get him within their clutches. ‘Ah, my

dear sir,' once remarked one of these worthies, ' how transitory are all human pleasures ! ' and then he sighed before continuing, ' did you ever know a man who after three basins of turtle cared for a fourth ? '

We don't eat toads, but negroes do and find them palatable. Sharks and crocodiles are good eating, and in the north of Scotland the small smooth shark is often eaten and is esteemed a dainty, while the opulent Chinese greatly enjoy the fins of another species of the same formidable fish.

Bees, grubs, white ants, grasshoppers, locusts, spiders, caterpillars, and even the chrysalis of the silkworm, are all eaten ; and in the south of Europe during Lent the vineyard snail is in request, and thus the conscience is satisfied and the letter of the law apparently respected, while the dietary is not without a fair supply of stimulating animal food. If rumour does not err, cockchafers delicately preserved in sugar are regarded as delicious sweetmeats in at least one highly civilised European country.

By the way, the reader may be interested to hear how destructive the siege of Paris was to animal life. When every kind of comestible was at famine prices, and when nothing except man that had life was permitted to escape, the Parisians swept the streets and the zoological gardens clean. Twelve hundred dogs disappeared during the siege in a manner unwonted in Paris ; one would have expected that a hundred times as many would have found their way to the table, and it is said that their flesh was much relished, quite apart from the condiment which extreme hunger gave the appetite ; 3,000 cats also went the same way, and made dishes as savoury as though unattended by the disastrous consequences which followed the meat on which the old clergyman, mentioned earlier in this article, regaled himself. Two bears vanished in the same fashion, and their flesh was compared to pork ; 65,000 horses, pleasantly called by the Parisians ' siege venison,' furnished a large supply of wholesome food in the terrible winter of 1870-1. Three elephants followed or preceded, I know not which, the horses and cats, and were much commended, and with them went 1,000 asses and 2,000 mules. The last were said to be delicious, and far more delicate than beef ; but let me remind the reader that those famous Bologna sausages which every one has heard so much about are in part made of the flesh of the ass. Three kangaroos were eaten during the siege, and very greatly enjoyed ; nor is this astonishing, for in Australia

kangaroo-tail soup is preferred to ox-tail soup, and in my humble judgment is far more palatable. And in the last place the Parisians made short work of a seal, and said it resembled lamb.

I think that I have said enough to prove my assertion, that man eats and enjoys almost everything that has life and which he can lay his hands upon. Now I will say a little as to the amount of food which man contrives to get through. During the Lancashire famine, when food was scarce among the cotton workers, they were condemned to a diet of such scantiness that there was nothing to tempt the appetite, while it was often only just sufficient to keep the poor creatures alive—in other words, though they could live upon it they could not have done any work, while had they been exposed to severe cold or to dangerous contagious illness they would have perished in vast numbers. The amount of food they received was two pounds to two pounds and a quarter of bread a day. Yet this scanty allowance was luxurious and abundant compared with the rations that on certain occasions men have managed to exist upon for a long time. For instance, in the often-quoted mutiny of the 'Bounty,' Captain Bligh and twenty-five of his men were set adrift in boats near the Friendly Islands. From the end of April to the close of May these unhappy people subsisted—they could not be said to live—on a daily allowance of one twenty-fifth of a pound of biscuit apiece, with a quarter of a pint of water, and occasionally a teaspoonful or two of rum ; the last, I may remark, modern scientific researches would lead us to regard as doing harm rather than adding to the value of the food. Such a diet as this can only be regarded as one of long-continued starvation, and the marvel is that all did not die ; perhaps the warmth of the climate and the inactivity to which their mode of life condemned them saved them, so that there was hardly any bodily waste ; these circumstances may have accounted in great measure for their passing through such a perilous ordeal. Probably the most extraordinary instance of prolonged starvation occurred in the memorable march of Sir John Franklin and Dr. Richardson from the shores of the Northern Ocean to Fort Enterprise. Only one hundred and forty miles had to be traversed, but the journey had to be accomplished in a climate demanding absolutely unstinted quantities of food, more particularly of an oily character, and the travellers could get little except *tripe de roche* to eat. Under these circumstances the worn and wearied wanderers found that a mile a day was as much as their feeble strength could

accomplish. One of the party, Michel, a half-breed Iroquois, continued strong and active while his companions were dying around him, but afterwards it was discovered that he had been living on the flesh of the dead, killing when necessity arose one of the emaciated and enfeebled companions of his march.

In his savage condition man, when he can get food, will eat till nature rebels, and he cannot contain more; indeed, it is one of the most unamiable traits of savages that, while they will cheerfully endure great hardships and privations from which there is no escape, they will, on the other hand, eat to repletion when the opportunity presents. In violent contrast, therefore, to the instances I have given of extreme privation, I shall cite a few of just as remarkable excess. The Hottentots, Bushmen, and savage South African races generally are enormous gluttons. 'Ten of them,' says Barrow, 'ate, in my presence, the whole of an ox all but the hind legs in three days, and the three Bosjesmans that accompanied my wagon devoured a sheep on one occasion in less than twenty-four hours.' In cold climates such feats as these would only be trifles, and Parry and Ross have recorded cases that, were they not well attested, would pass belief. Sir Edward Parry once tried the capacity of an Eskimo scarcely full grown, and this interesting young savage contrived in twenty-four hours to devour 4 lbs. 4 oz. of the raw, hard-frozen flesh of a seahorse, the same quantity of it boiled, 1 lb. 12 oz. of bread and bread dust, a pint and a quarter of rich gravy soup, a tumbler of strong grog, three wineglasses of raw spirit, and nine pints of water. Sir John Ross indeed believed that the daily rations of an Eskimo were 20 lbs. of flesh and blubber, but, in extenuation of so enormous a consumption as this, the severity of the climate must be taken into account. Perhaps the most astounding example of inhuman gluttony recorded is that by Captain Cochrane, on the authority of the Russian admiral Saritcheff, who was told that one of the Yakuts had consumed the hind quarter of a large ox in twenty-four hours, together with 20 lbs. of fat and a proportionate quantity of melted butter. As the man had already gorged himself in this disgusting fashion, it hardly seemed possible that he would be able to consume any more; but the worthy Russian admiral, to test him, gave the savage a thick porridge of rice boiled with 3 lbs. of butter, weighing together 28 lbs. The glutton sat down to this abundant banquet, although he had just partaken of breakfast, and, without stirring from the spot or show-

ing any sign of inconvenience, got through the whole. Captain Cochrane adds that a good large calf, weighing 200 lbs., will just make a meal for four or five Yakuts, and that he has seen three of them consume a whole reindeer at one meal. Not to be too hard on these unsophisticated children of nature, I must say that the feats of English working men, on their annual club feast day, would surpass belief: a leg of mutton has not been found too much for the requirements of one man. The late Dr. Darwin, of Shrewsbury, the father of the illustrious Charles Darwin, had the local reputation of being a glutton, and is reported to have called a goose—a favourite Salop dish—‘an inconvenient one, as being too much for one and not enough for two.’

To conclude: strange fashions are not confined to our own age or country. Holinshed, the famous and amusing chronicler of the sixteenth century, comments severely upon the manners of the English of his day. He tells us that ‘in number of dishes and changes of meat the nobility of England (whose cooks are for the most part Frenchmen and foreigners) do most exceed: till there is no day in manner that passeth over their heads, wherein they have not only beef, mutton, veal, lamb, kid, pork, cony, capon, pig, or so many of them as the season yieldeth, but also some portion of the red and fallow deer, beside variety of fish and wild fowl, and thereto sundry other delicacies wherein the sweet hand of the seafaring Portingale is not wanting, so that for a man to dine with one of them and to taste of every dish that standeth before him, is rather to yield unto a conspiracy with a great deal of meat for the speedy suppression of natural health than the use of a necessary meal to satisfy himself with a competent repast to sustain his body withal.’ Much the same fashion is kept up to this day, and public banquets and the sumptuous tables of the opulent abound in all that can charm the eye and tempt the palate, and, let me add, lay the foundation of long and severe illness. How strange the contrast between this reckless profusion and the simplicity of some mediæval saint, whose diet was spare and plain to a degree, or of him, greater than any of the prophets, who did his glorious life-work on a sparing allowance of locusts, wild honey, and water!

THE COUNT Y.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE PIANO.

I FOLLOW Mrs. Westby's pale blue gown into the drawing-room in extremely low spirits. The dinner hour has not been a jovial one, and now I am in for a snubbing ; I can see it in every feature of Lady Dromore's face, and in every curve of Mrs. Westby's figure as she waddles in front of me.

Great heavens ! How justly the poet might have exclaimed—

' I hate a dumpy woman ! '

if he had known Mrs. Westby.

So I pull myself together as best I may, hold my head in the air, and stiffen my weary knees. If Lady Dromore is very rude, I shall inquire minutely after that sister of hers who she declares is travelling in America, but who is really in a dipsomaniac establishment near Dorking, as I accidentally discovered the other day.

Matters do not reach this extremity, however. The snubbing is more passive than active, and consists mainly in Lady Dromore and Mrs. Westby utterly ignoring my existence, while at the same time they evince a delicate sixth sense of the presence of an outsider by the dignity with which they confine their conversation to indifferent topics.

I warm my feet carefully at the fire ; then, finding that occupation pall in time, I stroll slowly across the room to the open piano and begin one of Chopin's dreamiest nocturnes.

Mrs. Stuart and Frances have gone into the little conservatory that opens out of the drawing-room. From where I sit I can see them in earnest conversation among the chrysanthemums. Frances is twisting the creamy petals of a jagged Meg Merriliees in her fidgety fingers ; but they are not talking about the flowers, I am sure. Never did Frances pour out so voluble a stream of words over the merits of any queen among them all—rose, lily, or chrysanthemum ; some very personal interest is lighting up her

face, and now she lets the Meg Merrilies fly back on its long stem, and lays her hand affectionately on Mrs. Stuart's arm.

One by one the men drop in, and bestow their persons where it seemeth good unto them. Mr. Mostyn is struggling with a yawn, and undisguisedly looking at his watch. Bryan, with unconscious heroism, makes straight for Lady Dromore and Mrs. Westby, but how long it takes to convince him that he might as well have attempted to storm the Redan single-handed I cannot tell, for Sir Allan has paused by the piano, and looks down hesitatingly at me.

It is pity that is softening his face—I know each line of it so well; but even his pity I will not scorn. Almost superstitiously do I long to be on friendly terms with him; it seems to me as if I could bear my lot more easily and do my duty more steadily after one kind word from Allan.

‘How has your musical education been getting on?’ I ask hurriedly, smothering Chopin’s sighs with remorseless hand so that they may accompany me monotonously pianissimo. ‘Do you know “God save the Queen” now when you hear it?’

‘Not unless I see fellows taking off their hats,’ with a reluctant smile.

‘At any rate you are spared a good deal,’ I continue, not caring much what I talk about so long as I keep him there. If he would only pull up that little cane chair and sit down! ‘You would listen quite gaily to a first lesson on the violin, I suppose?’

‘Just as gaily as I should listen to Joachim,’ he answers, laughing outright. His hand is on the back of the chair now.

‘Did you write that article in the *Tri-Weekly*, on Colonies in England?’ I ask with sudden boldness.

Allan looks sharply at me and frowns. ‘What put that into your head?’

‘Part of it reminded me so forcibly of some of our old talks that I felt sure you wrote it,’ I answer. ‘Sit down and tell me if you think of trying that experiment about a self-supporting village in the north.’

He pulls up the chair and sits down, but ‘I am not going to talk about my colony to you,’ he says calmly. ‘I used to imagine at one time that you were capable of taking an interest in such things, but I have had my eyes opened since then.’

‘I don’t know what you mean; I never set up for being any

better than other girls. You always knew I was fond of amusing myself, and—and—' I am so anxious to regain his good opinion, or rather to discover why I have forfeited it, that my breath comes short, and my wits take to themselves wings and fly away.

'At any rate,' I exclaim desperately, throwing all defence of my character to the winds, 'I am no different now from what I used to be, except that trouble has sobered me; and we used to be very good friends. Why can't we be friends again?'

Allan meets my wistful look with a puzzled expression.

'No, I dare say you are the same, but I had a different idea of you.' Then with a sudden flash of wrath, 'I cannot understand how you could do such a cold-blooded, heartless thing!'

What does he mean? Is it my marriage he is alluding to? He knows that I only married Bryan after he had deserted me, and it is horribly unfair of him to talk of heartlessness.

Open-eyed and breathless with excitement, we are gazing at one another, Allan leaning forward with tilted chair, I turning round on the music stool.

'I don't understand you,' I answer slowly. 'How could you possibly expect me——' and I pause, searching for words to remind him of the past, and yet which will not be disloyal to Bryan.

Allan waits with painful intentness.

'How could any girl be expected——' I begin again, when a light laugh rings out behind us, and Frances' hand is laid on my shoulder.

'At any rate *I* am not afraid of her,' she says. 'Mrs. Stuart wants you to play again, Esmé, but she does not like to ask you. She says you made such crushing remarks the other day about objecting to accompany conversation.'

'So I do generally,' I exclaim, trembling with disappointment and turning round in piteous appeal to Frances. Oh, how cruel of her to rob me of my one chance! 'But I am in a more modest frame of mind this evening, and I will play the most encouraging of accompaniments if you will go and mollify Mrs. Stuart.'

'Very well,' says Frances, without budging an inch. 'Only don't play Chopin; he is too depressing. Play that thing Bryan is so fond of; you know what I mean—that waltz he always asks you for, every evening after dinner. She ought to be in good practice, Sir Allan; she plays to Bryan by the hour together!'

At this soothing picture of domestic bliss Allan starts up hastily and looks around for a retreat. By a deft movement Frances places herself in front of him, so that they walk away from the piano together with the decorous appearance of lady first, gentleman following.

'I can assure you there are moments when I find myself forcibly reminded that "two is company, three is trumpery,"' says Frances, smiling back at Allan over her shoulder, as she moves towards a vacant corner. 'Bryan is so devoted, and Esmé is one of those affectionate people—'

Her voice dies off to a confidential murmur, and I turn back to the piano to hide my mortification as best I may under a volley of notes.



'Si oiseau j'étais, à toi je volerais !' I dare say; but what sort of a reception should I get?

As I rattle lightly along something in the very contrast of the music brings Mendelssohn's beautiful setting of the 55th Psalm to my mind—

Oh for the wings of a dove ! Far away, far away would I roam,

and the tears fill my eyes. There is no rest, no peace for me. I am full of trouble, and the thought that it is partly my own doing makes it no easier to bear.

There is dead silence for a moment as I finish. The light brilliance of the bird-like rush has caught people's attention, although of course they are not so impressed as they would have been with a good musical box.

'Wonderful execution !' says Mr. Westby.

'You must practise a great deal, Mrs. Mansfield,' remarks Lord Dromore, with the air of a critic.

'That's the curious part of it,' interposes Bryan, coming up to

my side ; ‘she scarcely practises at all.’ And he rubs his hands with modest triumph.

Lady Dromore now considers it high time to divert attention from so unworthy an object.

‘We must be going,’ she declares, retrieving her lord with a stony glance, and marching up to our hostess to say good-bye.

‘No, wait a minute,’ whispers Mrs. Stuart, when I too would take my leave. ‘I want to speak to you. Good-bye, Mr. Mostyn.’

Then putting her hand through my arm and guiding me through the drawing-room, ‘Come and show me which chrysanthemums you would like cuttings of,’ she begins loudly; and I wonder within myself what she can be driving at, for never have I breathed a word about chrysanthemums to her.

When we are fairly inside the conservatory, ‘I want you to lend me Frances,’ she says persuasively ; ‘she would like to come and stay with me if you have no objection.’

‘Of course I have no objection,’ I return, rather puzzled, nevertheless, at this sudden friendship. We have known Mrs. Stuart all our lives, but have never stayed at one another’s houses before.

‘Do you want her to come to you before Christmas or after ?’

‘Christmas ! Dear Esmé, how innocent you are ! Why, I want her to come to me to-morrow. Sir Allan is only staying a few days longer.’

‘To-morrow !’

The blood rushes in an angry wave to my face. So that is what she and Frances were talking about in here after dinner ! Frances must have given her a good broad hint that she would like to come. How indecent she can be ! It really is not kind of Mrs. Stuart to encourage her in such a barefaced husband-hunt.

‘Yes, to-morrow. You don’t mind, do you ?’

And Mrs. Stuart looks up curiously at me. Something in her expression warns me to be on my guard. How far have Frances’ confidences led her, I wonder ?

‘I do not mind,’ I answer slowly, ‘except that it seems rather queer for her to come over so suddenly.’

‘No one will notice it,’ returns Mrs. Stuart. ‘There are no women in the house, and men never see anything.’

'N—no,' I murmur dubiously.

'It is a pity to lose the opportunity,' she goes on. 'It would be such a splendid match for Frances. He really does seem taken with her, and if he leaves us without proposing she won't have much chance. All the girls in England will be at his heels, and a man so soon gets spoilt.'

'You are very interested in the affair,' I say vaguely, as she pauses. I must say something, and it certainly must not be what I think.

'Of course I am! Allan Vaudrey is one of my best friends, and if he marries a stranger I shall never see anything more of him. Now I always have liked Frances.'

'Yes,' I murmur, with parrotty assent; 'most people do like Frances.'

Something in my stiff, unsympathetic bearing annoys Mrs. Stuart.

'I think also,' she exclaims, in a tone I have never heard from her before, and with an impatient shrug of the shoulders, 'that women who have married happily and well ought to do all that is in their power for girls—particularly for a nice girl in Frances lonely and desolate position!'

Clearly I must look to my fair fame and beware of slander. So repressing the angry retort that rises to my lips and wreathing them instead in a very tolerable smile, I rejoin good-humouredly, 'Of course we ought! Only please don't call Frances lonely or desolate. My home is always hers; and as to paying visits to-morrow or at any time, she is perfectly free to make her own plans. Shall we go back to the drawing-room now? It is getting late.'

A more approving consent I cannot bring myself to give; but apparently, like Mercutio's wound, 'it is enough,' for Mrs. Stuart calls out gaily as we emerge from the conservatory,

'Frances, you must be a good, obedient girl, and come over here to-morrow. Esmé says she can spare you better now than later on, and I was really beginning to think that your long-talked-of visit would never come off.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHARITIES.

FRANCES wastes no words during the long drive home; having attained her object she leans back in satisfied silence.

Bryan also is satisfied; though wherefore it would be hard to say, the slight facts he alludes to affording but insufficient ground, to an impartial mind, for rejoicing over his social success. Lady Dromore, it seems, grunted twice in answer to his conversational attempts; Mrs. Westby informed him that Prince Henry of Battenburg was coming to breakfast the next time the hounds met at Rakefield, and that she had invited all the *nice* people she knew to meet his Royal Highness; and Lord Dromore quite agreed when he—Bryan—remarked that it was a cold evening.

All that night I lie awake, open-eyed, pondering many things.

At first bitter wrath stirs my blood and I toss angrily about, cursing my own hasty folly in for ever putting a gulf between my love and me, and chafing against the unkind fate which seems determined that we shall not even be friends.

As for Frances and her contemptible tricks and wiles, I will tolerate them no longer. I will give her plainly to understand that if she wishes to remain under my roof she must alter her behaviour. I have enough to worry me surely, without needlessly enduring her pinpricks.

But as the still hours wear on a wiser calm steals over me. Joy and happiness, it is true, I have put away from me for ever; but peace may at least be mine—the repose that comes from perseverance in well-doing. I have tried hard to do right lately; yet peace and I have been far from each other. Rather, indeed, have I learnt how much one can endure and still present a smiling face to the world. How am I to earn it? Only by doing God's will, the will divinely summed up in those mighty words, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbour as thyself.'

The first commandment is for my heart and me. The second . . . how am I fulfilling it?

I told Bryan plainly before I married him that there could be no pretence of affection on my part, but that I would do my duty to him to the utmost of my power; and I am keeping my word.

Never once have I flinched from his side, and never once have I spoken to him with deliberate unkindness ; to be candid with myself, I must confess to occasional snaps and sharp answers, but they have been always quickly repented of and promptly repaired. Surely if my cheek is constantly burning with mortification at his sayings, and my eyes often lowered in annoyance at his doings, that is my punishment, not my crime.

With regard to Frances my conscience is not so clear. What right have I to be annoyed at her flirtation with Allan Vaudrey ?

Yes, I dare say it is inconsiderate, unkind, unsisterly of her to single out the very man whom I have so loved and for whom I have so suffered. But why should I interfere if such a desirable marriage be possible for her ?

For Allan's sake ?

In spite of his unworthy treatment of me, I still think him immeasurably too good for Frances ; but if she pleases him what business is that of mine ? Though he married a paragon universally admitted to combine in her one person all the graces and all the virtues, I should certainly consider her a most objectionable creature ! Frances is no worse than other girls, I suppose (I have never had an exalted opinion of my own sex) ; she is bright, pretty, good-tempered, and, with plenty of money to give her what she wants, is a charming creature to live with. In the old days—ah ! those happy old days !—I used always to think her a delightful girl ; and if adversity has brought out certain bad qualities, the happy sun of prosperity will perhaps warm her back to her own genial self again.

So what need have I, for Sir Allan Vaudrey's sake, to throw obstacles in the way of my sister's meeting him ?

I had better acknowledge the truth. It is jealousy that is disturbing me so—jealousy patent to others—to Mrs. Stuart and to Frances—though I will scarce admit it myself.

To know one's weakness is half the battle ; and I rise in the morning, pale and weary, but determined to do my duty.

Frances eyes me apprehensively when we meet at the breakfast-table, evidently thinking it possible that at the eleventh hour I may try and prevent her visit.

' Will you have the victoria or the brougham this afternoon ? ' I ask, smiling at her with the teapot poised in mid air. ' I am going to ride, so it won't make any difference to me which you prefer.'

'Then I will have the brougham,' she says with a little sigh of relief, the red colour fluttering back to her face—Frances' complexion is as delicately variable as a child's. 'I need not leave here till four, so as to get there about tea-time. That's the most propitious moment to arrive, isn't it?'

'Yes, I think so,' I agree—a twinge shooting through me as I picture the group round Mrs. Stuart's tea-table. 'I have told Julie to see to your packing, and to take you anything of mine that you would care to wear. You would like my pink ostrich fan to go with your pink gown, wouldn't you?'

Frances shakes her head with a serious air.

'I shall not take my pink gown,' she says solemnly. 'I am only going to wear my old white ones. Simplicity and modest merit are the watchwords of this crisis.'

The candid exposition of her plans is here stopped by the arrival of Bryan upon the scene. He has not until now grasped the fact that Frances is going to leave us for a while; and his joy upon being informed of her approaching departure is indecently manifest.

'Stay as long as you feel inclined,' he urges repeatedly. 'We shall be very glad to return any kindness the Stuarts show you. I can make it up to Stuart over the shooting; he shall have a good place when we shoot the Home Covert.'

Now that Frances, with nods and becks and many a smile, is fairly off, I determine to take advantage of my *tête-à-tête* with Bryan to get a clearer idea of our monetary position.

I am not at all satisfied with the arrangement of our finances. Bryan encourages me to run up endless bills and give reckless orders, but I never can get any money from him; nor has he ever given me a clear statement of his means, often as I have asked him. Although our establishment is mounted upon an extravagant scale, and the expenditure in the stables and out of doors generally is lavish, twenty thousand a year is a large income, and will, I dare say, cover everything when once the cost of furnishing is cleared off. But I want to hear definitely from Bryan that we are justified in spending that amount; and I should like an allowance for my own private use, that I might economise upon my clothes and have some money for charity.

Bryan is so touchy and queer about his affairs, that I select the moment for my investigations with care. After dinner he is

always sleepy, and, if disturbed, inclined to be fractious ; after breakfast, when we are not hunting, he retires to the library and writes mysterious documents which he shuffles away when I go in ; but after luncheon he is generally in a bland, chatty frame of mind.

'Bryan, I have not been at all pleased with Mrs. Marston lately,' I begin, one day about half-past two. My choice of opening subject has also been well considered ; Mrs. Marston is the housekeeper, and Bryan usually loves talking about the servants.

'Haven't you, though ? What has she been doing ?'

'I can't get proper accounts from her ; and it's a regular case of "pull devil, pull baker" whenever I want to look at the tradespeople's books.'

'Is that all ?' returns Bryan. 'She has evidently lived in families where these things are considered beneath the lady's notice.'

'Very likely ; but they are not beneath the lady's notice in this family. And that reminds me—how much do you think we ought to spend in the house, Bryan ?'

'To spend in the house !' repeats my husband vacantly. 'I really don't know. Oh, I see here that the Duke of Sackville is not expected to recover.'

He is leaning over the billiard-table, drinking in news from the imaginative columns of a Society paper.

'Poor fellow !' I respond philosophically. 'But you must have some idea of our income, Bryan ? If you would only just tell me how much we ought to spend, I could arrange everything accordingly.'

'I don't see that any fresh arrangement is wanted,' with a sulky shake of 'The Scavenger.' 'It is no use my going into figures with you ; women never understand business. When I complain of the amount of money spent, it will be time enough for you to talk about fresh arrangements.'

'I know I don't understand business,' endeavouring to combine meekness and firmness in happy proportions ; 'no one can be more ignorant of it than I. But you might explain to me how much money you have and what it brings you in every year. You surely don't mind my knowing, do you, Bryan ?'

'I don't think you display much confidence in me when you bother me so about details,' answers Bryan, evasively important.

I sigh impatiently and am mute.

'You have everything you want, have you not?' he pursues, gathering up his paper and preparing for retreat.

'I have, in one way,' I answer slowly; 'but I should like some money for charity. I never have a penny to give away.'

'To give away!' repeats Bryan with an astonished air; 'and you have just been grumbling about expense! How inconsistent women are, to be sure!'

Then, in a softer tone—for Bryan does not like to refuse me anything—he asks, 'Well! How much do you want? Five pounds? Ten pounds? Look here, now, I'll give you all the ready money I have about me.'

And he empties his pockets on the billiard-table.

'Six pounds and eight shillings. There, you can make ducks and drakes of that! I don't know what you will be able to do with it, as the neighbourhood is by no means a poor one. Well, ta-ta, I must go and see Godbold about those new forcing-pits.'

Wherewith he marches off, quite alertly for him; and I, like the damsel in the song, am left lamenting.

Next day, however, a new aspect of the case has occurred to Bryan.

'By the way, Esmé,' he says, emerging from the library with his hands full of papers, 'I find there is a good deal of sense in what you were saying yesterday as to giving money away. I have been looking up these applications and I see that the best people about here give very regularly. Lord Dromore, for instance, is an annual subscriber to this lot,' holding out the right-hand packet, 'and has given donations to these,' flourishing the left. 'You see,' apologetically, 'I have never lived in the country before, and it did not strike me how such things would be criticised. You were quite right to speak about it—quite right.'

I open my mouth to deprecate this unmerited praise, but shut it again feebly; an explanation with Bryan is so exhausting.

'I wonder it never occurred to Frances to remind me of the importance of well-chosen almsgiving before,' continues my husband, the irritated expression appearing in his face which Frances' name always brings there. 'She is generally quick enough to mention anything bearing upon our social position.'

'What are these charities?' I ask, slipping off the elastic bands with which he has secured the two bundles.

'Don't mix them, dear,' exclaims Bryan hastily. 'I thought I

could not do better than follow Lord Dromore's lead, so I have sorted out his subscriptions and his donations. I shall write cheques for the same amounts.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BALL.

FRANCES betook herself to Mrs. Stuart's on a Thursday.

The following Monday Bryan goes out hunting alone. By artful manipulation of that feminine weapon, a bad headache, I have persuaded him to leave me at home in peace—a peace untarnished by fear of any interruption whatsoever, as I emphasise my holiday by giving prompt orders that no visitors are to be admitted.

Then, flinging aside all pretence of occupation, I indulge in the doubtful luxury of my own thoughts.

From room to room I wander, drawing long breaths of relief at my unwonted liberty. For one whole day I am free to sigh or to smile, to laugh or to cry, as the fancy takes me, without the necessity of a full and radical explanation of what has pleased or grieved me. For one whole day I am released from Frances' inquisitive and too-comprehending gaze, from Bryan's interminable discussion of the dullest details. Poor Bryan! Had ever man so heavy a conversational touch, so fatal a habit of worrying a subject to death?

This morning he prosed steadily through breakfast about the grilled chicken in front of him. I wonder, should I think Allan Vaudrey dull if he talked about grilled chicken? Rather, I am afraid, should I consider his remarks worthy of being printed as a companion essay to Elia's '*'Roast Pig!*'

It is very hard that my interest in Allan should so terribly have outlived his interest in me. I am the same Esmé, whose every movement his eyes used to follow; yet how terribly is my influence over him gone!

I walk to the long glass at the end of the drawing-room and inspect my charms critically in the cold grey November light.

No, it is no waning in my beauty that has estranged him. Though I have grown very thin, I am prettier than ever, and, as I stand gazing into those soft dark eyes as though they were a

stranger's, a great flood of self-pity comes over me. I look so young, so fragile, to be so hopeless—and in despair I cast myself down on a sofa hard by and burst into bitter tears.

I must have lain there, prone and sobbing, for a full quarter of an hour, when a discreet cough breaks upon my ear.

Burrowing, face downwards, between two cushions is doubtless not apt to quicken one's sense of hearing; still I think if Dixon had rattled the door-handle, or tripped over a convenient footstool, he might have aroused me, instead of coming within three feet before he gives the faintest warning of his presence.

'Miss Nugent is at the door, ma'am,' he begins composedly, as I raise myself with a jerk, and present the back of my head perpendicularly instead of horizontally for his minute inspection; 'she is on horseback, and would be much obliged if you would come out and speak to her, as she does not wish to dismount.'

'Who is with Miss Nugent?' I ask, in hideous perturbation, as I bethink me of my red nose and swollen eyelids.

'Miss Nugent is alone, ma'am.'

'Go and say that I will come to her in a moment.'

Which moment is spent in mopping my eyes and pushing back my ruffled hair. How can I ever be sufficiently thankful that the gods have inspired Frances to ride over alone? What should I have done if any one else had arrived to find me in such obvious woe for no obvious reason? It is bad enough to have to meet my sister's cool eyes out of doors in the broad light, and this will be a lesson to me to bottle up my tears in future for the privacy of my chamber and nightfall. Languidly I cross the hall. What can Frances want, I wonder? Some more gowns perhaps; I thought she was taking too few. Dixon throws open the front door and I emerge upon the big stone step, bareheaded and defenceless from the garish day, to find not only Frances but Sir Allan Vaudrey waiting for me. It is too late to draw back, but I cannot control the startled exclamation—

'Dixon told me you were alone, Frances!'

'Yes. Don't be angry with him, poor fellow!' with a sunny smile, well aimed over my shoulder at the mendacious domestic. 'I told him to say so because I didn't want the bother of getting off, and I was afraid you might decline to interview any one else upon the doorstep. So we agreed that Sir Allan did not count!'

She is mounted upon a fidgety grey cob and looks almost like a child, with her tiny waist and slim shoulders. All Frances'

height is in her legs. Sir Allan, on a bay weight-carrier, is well behind her, and as he confines his greeting to a bow and a brief ‘Good-morning,’ has very very much the air of squire in attendance. But alas ! I know from old experience that those grey eyes of his are far-seeing and astute, and I much fear that the poor little stratagem of shading my forehead from the light with outstretched fingers will be of small avail in concealing such palpable tear-stains. Surely never was burst of weeping more ill-timed !

‘Well, you don’t seem overjoyed at beholding us,’ pursues my sister, as she restrains her steed from a playful attempt to nibble my gown ; ‘and yet we have come a good bit out of our way to see you. Bryan told us we should find you at home.’

‘Oh, you have seen Bryan, have you ?’ is all I can manage to get out.

‘We have had that honour. What a shame of him to leave you behind, you poor old darling ! It is such a jolly morning !’ in compassionate accents.

‘How absurd you are, Frances ! As if Bryan would leave me at home if I wanted to go !’ I exclaim angrily.

‘Oh, of course I know he is perfect,’ smiling provokingly. ‘But I haven’t lost the chance of a run to-day to hear you sing the praises of your beloved. I came to say that Mrs. Stuart has asked me to stay till next week and go to the Brackham ball with her. You don’t mind, do you ?’

‘Not at all.’

‘And then I thought that you need not turn out unless you like,’ pursues Frances. ‘I know you were going principally on my account.’

‘Thank you,’ I reply shortly.

I think Allan might say something to me instead of sitting there in grim, observant silence. He is evidently going to stay for the ball.

‘We must be jogging now,’ says Frances, with calm appropriation of her escort. ‘You are sure you don’t mind my staying on ? No ? I thought you wouldn’t. I expect you and Bryan are perfectly delighted to get rid of me. I suppose you are

Still amorous and fond and billing,
Like Philip and Mary on a shilling.

Eh ?

‘If you have nothing more to say, I think I will go in,’ I remark, loftily ignoring her odious little couplet. ‘It is very

cold standing here. Good morning, Sir Allan. Good-bye, Frances.'

And I march indoors, with as much dignity as the circumstances will allow. From behind the morning-room window-curtains I watch them ride off, Frances very close to Sir Allan's knee, and her pretty chin tilted up in the air towards him as she chatters away confidently. I expect she is observing that dear Esmé must have had a tiff with her husband, as nothing else ever makes her cry; and that it is a most unusual occurrence, for a more devoted couple could not be found in the length and breadth of our island than Bryan Mansfield and her sister!

I abandon myself to no more tears after this; not that the cause for them is less, but that wrath has momentarily swallowed up woe, and my anger is all-absorbing and inclusive. I am furious with Frances, furious also with Sir Allan, though what the poor man has done except hold his tongue it would be hard to say; and most furious with myself for the undignified figure I have cut this morning. To be found sobbing noisily by the butler is annoying; but to have my blurred and distorted face mercilessly exposed to the prolonged gaze of the man before whom I would fain wear my fairest appearance is hard indeed. What a foil I must have presented to Frances' dainty skin and clear-cut features! Of course I ought not to care so terribly about Sir Allan's thoughts of me; I know that perfectly well; and the struggle to push him out of my mind alternates cheerfully during the rest of the day with wrathful invectives against Fate and hopeless attempts at a more righteous frame of mind.

* * * * *

'You look well turned out, Esmé,' says Bryan, as he surveys me critically before we start for the Brackham ball; 'but you are very pale. Can't you do anything for it, eh?'

'Do anything for it?' I repeat inquiringly. 'How do you mean?'

'Couldn't you touch up your cheeks a little?' he explains. 'I dare say there is some rouge about,' and he peers among the silver bottles and knicknacks of my toilet-table.

'Non, Monsieur, Madame n'en a pas; mais moi je puis en trouver,' shrieks Julie, flying delightedly in the direction of her own apartment.

'Come back, Julie, at once,' I vociferate, 'and fasten my

mantle. Mr. Mansfield was only joking. He knows I would not paint my face. Now, Bryan, shall we start ?'

'I don't know why you shouldn't paint your face,' grumbles my husband, two minutes later, as we bowl along in the cosy little brougham. 'You will have to begin some time or other, and the least touch of rouge would have been an immense improvement to-night. You have been looking very white lately.'

'It is the cold weather,' I answer cheerfully. 'You have no idea how red I shall get as soon as I begin to dance ; a peony will be faded compared with my complexion.'

'Have you been feeling the cold so much?' asks Bryan anxiously. 'You have never mentioned it before. Would you like to go abroad after Christmas? I think I will get Dr. Singleton to see you to-morrow.'

'Nonsense, Bryan!' I exclaim, laughing in spite of myself at the idea of the village doctor making a palpable examination of my heart as a cure for its impalpable woes. 'I am perfectly well. How hard the roads sound! Do you think there will be any hunting to-morrow ?'

I am being borne along to the ball in a tolerably jovial frame of mind, all things considered. Hope is hard to kill; and one has better chances of a *tête-à-tête* at a ball than at any other festivity. Allan can hardly fail to ask me to dance ; and though it be only once we shall be practically alone for a quarter of an hour, in which not even Frances can interrupt us. Nor does any fear of feminine snubs assail my mind. At a ball, as in a better world, I shall rise superior to dowagers. What matter the frowns and averted glances of whole bench-loads of old women when there are plenty of men to make a fuss over me? So with radiant mien, not wholly feigned, I enter the well-known room.

The dowagers are there—as uninteresting a dado as heart of man could conceive ; the men are there—in five minutes I am surrounded by a mob of black and red hunt coats ; and Allan is there, not dancing, but standing drearily by a door, and looking supremely out of tune with the whole festivity.

With much forethought I have decided that I will give him three dances, if he ask for them at once ; two, if he delay a little ; and one only, if he be conspicuously slack in coming forward. It has scarcely entered into my calculations that he should not come forward at all ; and yet that apparently is the course he has chalked out for himself. He sees me clearly enough, and

with cool politeness returns the bow I bestow upon him as our eyes meet. Now, for a woman to look away from the men who are thronging around her in a ball-room and bow to an individual who shows no intention whatever of joining the throng, is already a tolerable advance on her part. I can do no more.

Blankly I abandon every dance but one to those who clamour most eagerly ; it is too obvious I need not retain two, much less three. Tum te tum, tum te tum, goes the band, and off we start in ridiculous accord. Is there another form of mortal amusement so degradingly foolish as a dance ? To think of human beings who ought to have some work to do in the world (and who, if they have not, are of all men most miserable) twirling round in the middle of the night, mostly with tired, aching bodies, to the monotonous, purposeless, mechanical twanging of instruments ! It is true I did not take so bitter a view of dancing ten minutes ago, before Allan Vaudrey surveyed me indifferently and coolly from the opposite side of the room ; but while I am being whisked around in Lord Chadwyck's arms, my dress getting torn and my elbows scratched, it is powerfully borne in upon me that within the last twelve months I have grown too old for a ball-room.

My discovery, fortunately for me, does not affect my popularity. I may be tongue-tied and absent-minded, but what matters that at a ball ? The poetic eloquence of Sappho and the wit of Aspasia would be superfluous and unmarketable commodities with dancing men ; all they ask is a slim waist to put their respective arms around, a smart gown to walk with, and a person inside the gown who can keep step with their varied eccentricities of motion.

These requirements properly fulfilled, no further strain upon the intellect is necessary to satisfy them. So I scamper wildly with Lord Chadwyck, turn slowly under the gaselier in the centre of the room with Major Johnstone, take hurried little rushes with Mr. Mostyn, and blockade the ring of revolving couples with Archie Sinclair ; while the selfsame smile does duty when Lord Chadwyck says the room is getting hot, when Major Johnstone tells me his grandmother is dead and has left him a pot of money, when Mr. Mostyn remarks that he rode a brute to-day who came down with him twice, and when Archie Sinclair audaciously inquires whether my new aunt has converted Uncle Frank yet.

Meanwhile Sir Allan stands about the room and dances with no one.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CORRIDOR.

BRYAN, on the contrary, is dancing energetically, and presenting a living illustration of the maxim, 'If you cannot get what you like, it is best to like what you can get.' Meeting with no success when he invites the young and fair to join the mazy dance with him, he philosophically falls back upon the elderly and ugly. The higher the damsel's rank, the older and uglier may she be. He has drawn the line at Janet Harding, the Brackham curate's daughter, who, verging upon forty, smiles liberally upon *anything* in masculine attire; but he is more than content to be seen marching about with Lady Margaret Fitzduc, of years, wrinkles, and frightfulness untold. He has taken seven ladies down to supper, and finds himself more cordially received at this crisis of the evening than at any other time.

'Awful sell for Jack being left out in the cold,' says Major Johnstone, still upon the theme of his grandmother and her ducats; 'but he really has been going on too absurdly. Did you hear of his swarming up a lamp-post in Pall Mall with two policemen's helmets under his arms?'

'What for?' I inquire absently.

'For a lark, of course. He stopped the bobbies one after the other, and told 'em he was an M.P. just going to introduce a new bill for the reformation of the police headgear, and that he wanted to examine the width of their brims. Then off he bolted. I came along a few minutes afterwards and found him astride upon the lamp-post, reading out extracts from the "Police Manual for the guidance of constables in unusual circumstances."

'What did you do?' I ask, with provoking inattention. Frances is talking eagerly to Bryan, to my great astonishment, and with a smile and a turn of the head which I certainly have not seen her practise upon him since the Riverdalian days.

'Do? Nothing, of course,' responds Major Johnstone with an aggrieved air. His little story has fallen so very flat.

'At any rate, I hope it was not you who informed the grandmother,' I remark lightly. 'Come and talk to my sister. I have not spoken to her yet.'

But by the time we reach Frances, Bryan has left her, darting

off with most unusual alacrity. I feel inclined to dart after him in my morbid suspicion of Frances' prompting, but it takes some time to change the current of Major Johnstone's ideas, and he has only just mastered the fact that I want to speak to my sister.

'How are you, dear?' she says, meeting me more than half-way, and laying an unusually caressing hand upon my arm. 'You look so nice, and your gown is quite the prettiest in the room.'

'Thank you. I can bear that honour calmly.'

'I dare say,' acquiesces Frances with a laugh. 'The British provincial female has outdone herself to-night. Well, are you glad to hear that I am coming back to-morrow?'

'Very,' I answer with unfeigned relief. Sir Allan has not been paying her the least attention to-night, and when she comes home, and he leaves Mrs. Stuart's, surely she will turn her beguiling elsewhere, and I shall have my torture relaxed. Any other man with money would do just as well for Frances. By the way, Major Johnstone must be very rich now; he was well off before, and old Lady Killock's money has, after the manner of money, come where it was least wanted. Why should not Frances try her hand upon him?

'Will you stay with my sister, Major Johnstone? I see my husband looking wildly around for some one—he wants me, I suspect.'

I am slipping quietly off when Frances catches my hand detainingly.

'No, no, it is not you Bryan is looking for—it is some one else. Tell me, what time can you send for me to-morrow?' And before she releases me my next partner comes up.

I wonder if any married woman in love with another man than her husband ever felt herself so painfully degraded by it as I. As I walk and dance around that square, unbedecked ball-room, my knees trembling beneath me with agitation, my nerves on the stretch with excitement, it seems to me as if my humiliation must be written upon my face; as if every one who passed me must be able to read there how horribly I love Allan Vaudrey. To add to my misery, I am conscious that I should not be so ashamed if Allan cared for me as I for him; but to have this sick longing for the touch, the sound of the voice of a man who has dismissed me from his mind with such ease, is mortifying as well as wicked. And alas! a mind must be more perfectly attuned to

the heavenly harmonies than mine not to be as much troubled by the mortification as the wickedness.

My partner is discoursing with bland unconsciousness in my ear. To most of the misery in this world there seems to be a babbling accompaniment of small talk; the respectable, recognised sorrows which admit of open tears and undisguised mourning may be summed up on the fingers of one's hand. Surely they cannot be so hard to bear. If I could live in a black gown and sob noisily and openly all day long, I believe it would go half-way towards curing me of my woes.

'Yes; and it was a mangy vixen after all,' finishes Mr. Mostyn dismally.

'How tiresome!' I respond. 'Then she didn't give you any run?'

'Just crept up Birch Hill like a snail!'

Sir Allan has returned to the doorway through which Bryan disappeared a few minutes ago, and is looking inquiringly round the room. What lucky fair one is he searching for? Not Frances; his eye lights on her and passes her over. He is coming my way at last! Allah be praised! How glad I am, and how undignified to be so glad!

'They'll catch it from anything,' continues Mr. Mostyn. 'I have known a toy terrier start the mange in a whole country-side—'

'Is it too late to ask for a dance, Mrs. Mansfield?' asks Allan.

'I think I have one left.'

I hope that careless accent was not overdone. Mr. Mostyn evidently does not notice anything, for he tucks my hand under his arm again in his jerky fashion, and resumes the even tenor of our way, and his disquisition upon the iniquitous diseases of the vulpine race. Foxes alone agitate his heart.

Half an hour later Allan and I are seated together on one of the few benches in the corridor outside the ball-room.

The corridor has been reclaimed from the air of heaven and the frosts of earth by the aid of a little match-boarding and much bunting. Winds icier than an Arctic blast sport playfully with the tendrils of my hair and penetrate gaily down my bare back; but though each breezelet brought me certain bronchitis, and each draught lifelong rheumatism, I would hail them with cheerful indifference, for have I not at last got Allan all to myself, with no Frances to interrupt, and no Bryan to irritate?

Conversation at first hangs fire. Small wonder. Does not

Heine tell us that when he first met Goethe, after a weary pilgrimage to behold the features of the godlike being whom he had long reverenced from afar, no more exalted remark occurred to him wherewith to initiate the feast of reason and the flow of soul so eagerly anticipated during many a long winter night, than that 'the plums along the roadside from Jena to Weimar were excellent'?

If such paralysis of the wits thus assailed the brilliant poet, surely two ordinary mortals like Allan and myself may be forgiven for finding nothing more sympathetic to begin with than—

'I am afraid you are rather in a draught,'
and—

'Not at all, thanks. I like fresh air, you know.'

Then after a pause—

'I see you are as fond of dancing as ever,' says Allan.

'I am not fond of it at all,' I retort hastily.

'Appearances are deceitful then.'

'Very likely. I don't know how the world would go on wagging if we all looked and did as we felt inclined.'

'It is very easy to some people to conceal their feelings,' says Allan bitterly.

Now Allan has a nice voice, and in speaking to women it is soft and deferential; only to me it has lately been hard and sharp. When I consider this in calm solitude I comfort myself by arguing that the exception betrays strong feeling of some kind, and that after all I would rather he addressed me in different tones—harsh though they be—from those in which he agrees with Mrs. Westby that it is a fine day; but at the time the unaccustomed voice jars upon me, and makes me shrink within myself. Another pause.

'Did you like India?' I ask desperately. I must say something, and the minutes are slipping on.

'Very much. I had such a cheerful time there, and I heard such delightful news.'

'What news?'

'Of a wedding.'

'Ah! That is the first time I have heard a wedding spoken of with approbation. They are usually considered gruesome things.'

'I did not mean to speak of this wedding with approbation. I quite agree with you that it was a gruesome thing.'

'Really? where did it take place? In England or in India?'

'In England.'

'Then I should have thought you would have heard of it with complete indifference. I imagine you are one of those happy beings whose friends when out of sight are out of mind.'

'Thank you.'

I steal a side-glance at him. He looks very cross; and the conversation is not taking the turn I intended. Inside the ball-room the violins are getting excited; the waltz is more than half-way through. Allan shall start the next remark anyhow, and I will remain motionless and speechless until he says something.

As I make this doughty resolve I open my fan with a would-be careless flourish; but to my horror I see it shaking violently as if held in a palsied hand. I hastily shut it up again, and clasp my hands firmly together under its feathers, so that trembling fingers may not betray me. Then I look cautiously around to see if Allan has noticed my discomposure, and meet his eyes bent full upon me with an anxious, searching expression whence all crossness has vanished.

'Why could you not have told me yourself, that morning you walked to the station with me?' he asks suddenly.

'Told you what?'

'That you were going to marry Mansfield.'

'But I wasn't—I had not thought of it—he had not even asked me,' I rejoin in a breathless jumble.

A puzzled look comes over Allan's face.

'But you were thinking of it then?' he insists. 'You meant to marry him if—if things did not turn out well with me.'

'I don't understand you in the very least,' I return slowly, staring at him with wide-opened eyes. 'I never dreamt of marrying any one else until you—until you— Oh! er—well, I am sorry you did not like India.'

For Bryan here makes his appearance at the entrance from the ball-room, and saunters jauntily up to us.

'Of course he did not like India! Nobody ever does; only if a fellow *has* to stay there, he generally makes the best of it. Is there room for me on that bench, darling? Well, Sir Allan, have you been arranging with my wife when you are to come to us?'

I am fully aware that I deserve no sympathy. What wife does who begins a sentence to a man which she cannot finish in her husband's hearing? Who, loaded with that husband's benefits and kindnesses, owing everything in the world to him (even

the very gown upon her back), yet feels furious anger when he unconsciously interrupts the pleasing assurance she is giving her quondam lover that she has only married the unfortunate man as a last resource.

Allan mutters something indistinctly in reply to Bryan's question. What do they mean about his coming to us?

'Any time after your return from the North would suit us, provided it is this side of Christmas, on account of the shooting. The first week in December, eh ?'

'What is it you two are plotting ?' I break in hurriedly.

'Mr. Mansfield has been kind enough to ask me to stay with you,' says Allan, looking defiantly at me. 'Have you any objection ?'

I gaze at him in astonished silence—too full of joy to speak. So I need not say good-bye to him to-night ; without any planning of my own, Fate is arranging some delicious days for me.

I shall have him in my own house ; there will be endless opportunities of talking to him, not a beggarly quarter of an hour snatched from a ball-room, and already interrupted by Bryan—by Bryan !

Ah ! My eyes fall guiltily, and a shudder runs through me.

'Have you any objection, Mrs. Mansfield ?' repeats Sir Allan.

I answer not ; but my husband chuckles amusedly, and, with a fatuous laugh, exclaims—

'Any objection ! She is delighted, I know—and Frances too.'

Frances too ! It is not Fate, then, but Frances, who has made this arrangement.

Her unaccustomed smile at Bryan in the ball-room recurs to my mind.

It is quite possible she and Sir Allan have discussed it all beforehand, and in my overweening self-consciousness I have nearly been a marplot.

'Of course I am delighted,' I echo, lifting my eyes again and smiling carelessly ; 'and when you come to stay with me, Sir Allan, I won't entrap you into cold-catching draughts. The North Pole would be quite stuffy after this corridor. Shall we go back to the ball-room ?' with an amiable all-round turn of the head which amply includes Bryan.

(*To be continued.*)

